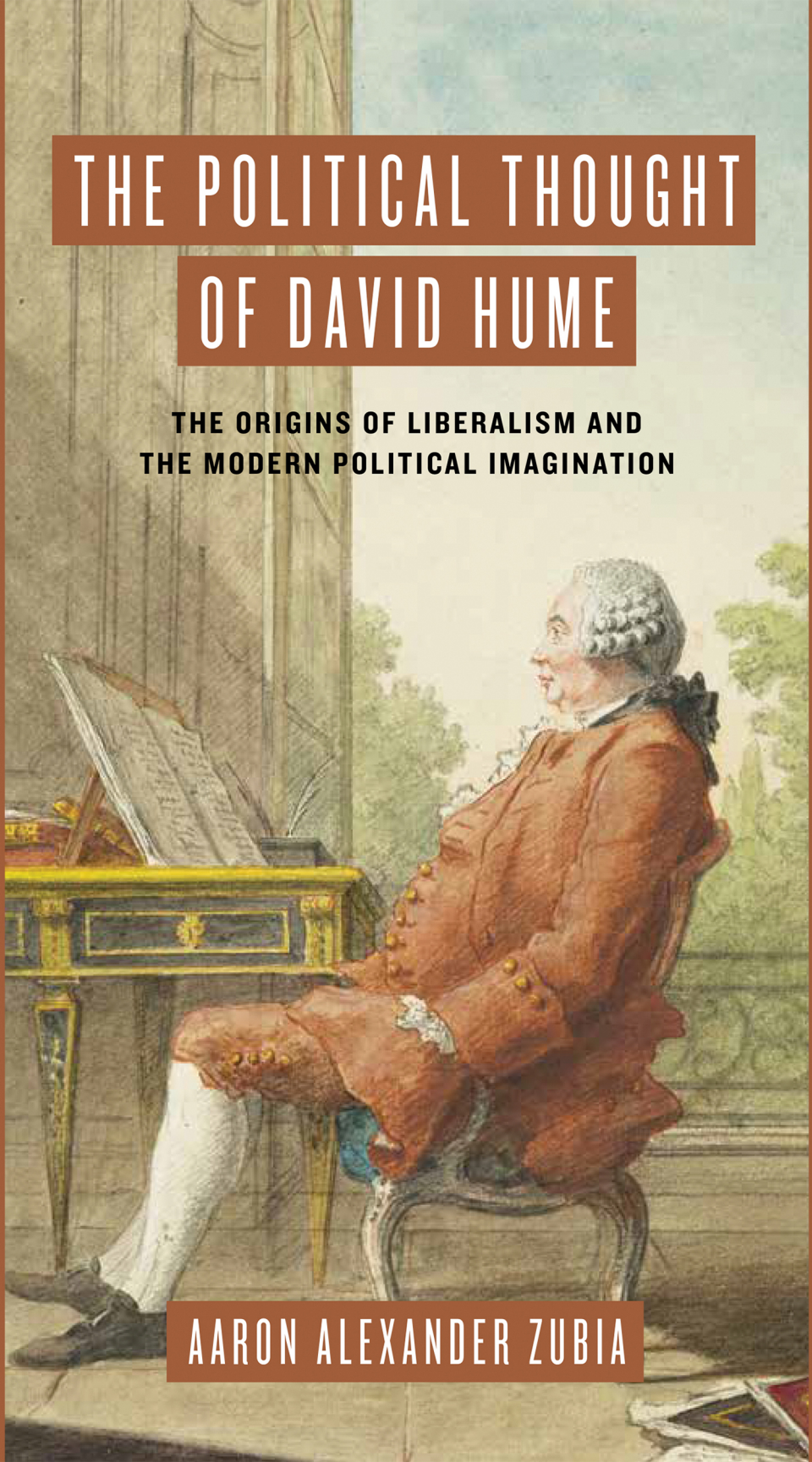
# THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF DAVID HUME

## THE ORIGINS OF LIBERALISM AND THE MODERN POLITICAL IMAGINATION



AARON ALEXANDER ZUBIA

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*To Corrie Beth, Marcus, and James Sanford*

*Among the ancient moralists, the Epicureans were the only sect who denied that there is any such thing as* honestum*, or moral worth, distinct from pleasure. In this Mr HUME's system agrees with theirs.*

—Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*

*By honestum, then, I mean that which can justly be esteemed on its own account, independently of any utility, and of any reward or profit that may accrue.*

—Cicero, *De officiis*

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This book is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Corrie Beth, and my two boys, Marcus and James Sanford. Nothing brightens my day like spending time with you: reading books, going on hikes, playing games, eating meals, annoying mommy. Hume reported nature's injunction as follows: "Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man." That comment could very well have been made by my wife, who ensures that amid all my study, I retain my humanity. I do so in large part by means of her companionship, which I cherish. I could not have imagined a better conversation partner or a better editor, who has the annoying practice of always cutting my favorite sentences. Thank you for selfless devotion to our family, for your advice, and for always listening, even when I used to talk incessantly about Hume while you were exhausted after having spent all day teaching schoolchildren. I love you.

# ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the following abbreviations for frequently cited primary texts. Each of Hume's essays to which I have referred has been drawn from the modern volume edited by Eugene F. Miller, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, and abbreviated as shown below. I have included the date of the essay's first appearance alongside the abbreviation. I have modified only excerpts from Hume's letters. I have done so by regularizing capitalization to enhance readability.

## WORKS OF DAVID HUME

DNR — *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In *Principal Writings on Religion*, edited by J. C. A. Gaskin. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Citations are by part, paragraph number, and page number.

E — *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. Edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987. Citations are by essay and page number. Individual essays, listed alphabetically, are referred to as follows:

- E-Av — "Of Avarice" (1741)
- E-BG — "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic" (1741)
- E-CL — "Of Civil Liberty" (1741)
- E-Co — "Of Commerce" (1752)

| | |
|---|---|
| E-CP | "Of the Coalition of Parties" (1758) |
| E-El | "Of Eloquence" (1742) |
| E-Ep | "The Epicurean" (1742) |
| E-EW | "Of Essay-Writing" (1742) |
| E-FP | "Of the First Principles of Government" (1741) |
| E-In | "Of Interest" (1752) |
| E-IP | "Of the Independency of Parliament" (1741) |
| E-IS | "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (1777) |
| E-MOL | "My Own Life" (1777) |
| E-MSL | "Of the Middle Station of Life" (1742) |
| E-NC | "Of National Characters" (1748) |
| E-OC | "Of the Original Contract" (1748) |
| E-OG | "Of the Origin of Government" (1777) |
| E-PA | "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations" (1752) |
| E-PG | "Of Parties in General" (1741) |
| E-PGB | "Of the Parties of Great Britain" (1741) |
| E-PO | "Of Passive Obedience" (1748) |
| E-PR | "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science" (1741) |
| E-RA | "Of Refinement in the Arts" (1752) |
| E-RP | "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences" (1742) |
| E-Sc | "The Sceptic" (1742) |
| E-SE | "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" (1741) |
| E-ST | "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757) |
| E-Su | "Of Suicide" (1777) |

| | |
|---|---|
| EHU | *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Tom Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Citations are by section and paragraph number. |
| EPM | *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Citations are by section and paragraph number. |
| HIST | *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. 6 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983. Citations are by volume and page number. |
| L | *The Letters of David Hume*. 2 vols. Edited by J. Y. T. Greig. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Citations are by volume and page number. |
| LG | *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*. Edinburgh, 1745. |
| NHR | "Natural History of Religion." In *Principal Writings on Religion*, edited by J. C. A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Citations are by section, paragraph, and page number. |
| NL | *New Letters of David Hume*. Edited by Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. |
| T | *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Citations are by book, part, section, and paragraph number. |

PART ONE

# Despiritualizing the World

# Introduction

David Hume (1711–76) was the leading man of letters in the late eighteenth century. And he remains influential. In a 2009 survey, academic philosophers selected Hume as the nonliving philosopher with whom they most identified. In his day, however, Hume was reputed less as a philosopher—that is, as the writer of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), for which he is best known today—than as an historian and a best-selling essayist.

In his time, Hume was famous not only for his wit but also for his rotundity. He was a gourmand. When describing his "elegant supper" at "Mr. Hume's," at which he enjoyed "three sorts of ice-creams," James Boswell (1740–95), in a letter to his friend, asked, "What think you of the northern Epicurus's style?" Hume, aware of his reputation, allegedly informed a friend at whose house he was going to dine, "Ye ken I'm no epicure, only a glutton."[1] Edward Gibbon (1737–94), the renowned English historian, begged to differ, referring to Hume as "that fattest of Epicurus's hogs."[2]

Although Hume, at the conclusion of his writing career, devoted himself to cooking and hosting dinner parties in Edinburgh, he had not earned his reputation as an epicure solely on account of his refined palate and enjoyment of claret. It was not only at his dining room table that Hume could be classified as a hog in Epicurus's pen, but also in his study.

John Brown (1715–66), for example, accused Hume of writing "with a pen truly Epicurean."[3]

We moderns tend to pride ourselves on being independent thinkers and inhabiting a world different from that of the ancients. We tend to view ancient philosophy as interesting but irrelevant. It might seem a matter of little importance that Hume's contemporaries tagged him with the Epicurean label. Even today, a person might be described as "stoical" for his discipline, or "epicurean" for his sensuality. But it is possible that Hume was called an "Epicurean" by his critics, not simply because he was corpulent, or a gastronome, but because he possessed an Epicurean mindset that shaped his moral and political writings.

This book explores the possibility that Hume's Epicurean mindset colored the modern political imagination. If it did, as this book suggests, then the way we think and talk about political society in the Anglophone world derives from an outlook on life that is far more ancient than we realize. If this is true, then it would be interesting, instructive, and useful to revisit the ancient doctrine from which our contemporary political self-understanding is at least in part derived and to contemplate ways in which we might tap into alternative classical sources to expand our political imaginations.

## HUME'S PHILOSOPHY: ANCIENT OR MODERN?

It is difficult to define Hume solely as an "Epicurean," because he was an eclectic writer. In one sense, Hume, as a philosopher, was unequivocally and unrepentantly modern.[4] After all, he lambasted ancient philosophers for their lack of intellectual independence, their "blind submission . . . to the several masters in each school" (E-RP 123). Hume subscribed, moreover, to a Newtonian method, acting cautiously, as had Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), "in admitting no principles but such as were founded on experiment" (HIST 6:542).[5]

In the subtitle of the *Treatise*, Hume presented his inquiry as an "attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." This was a Newtonian project, which sought to "contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge" by locating general principles of human nature, on which to "expect assurance and conviction" and to serve as a foundation for the rest of the sciences (T 1.4.7.14). He referred to his "sci-

ence of man" as an extension of the work of other modern philosophers, including "*Mr. Locke, my Lord Shaftesbury, Dr. Mandeville, Mr. Hutcheson,* [and] *Dr. Butler*," who aimed to develop an anatomy of human nature founded "entirely upon experience" (T Abs.2).

Even Hume, though, incorporated the language of the ancients into his philosophy. When Hume was a candidate for a professorship in moral philosophy at Edinburgh, one of his critics, William Wishart (1691–1753), the principal of Edinburgh University (1716–28), accused Hume of forwarding principles in the *Treatise* that made him unfit to guide students in their moral and spiritual formation.[6] According to Wishart, Hume advanced "errors concerning the very being and existence of a God," while "denying the immateriality of the soul" and "sapping the foundations of morality."[7] Hume wrote a reply, published as *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh* (1745), in which he defended himself against the charge of skepticism and irreligion. In this letter, he associated himself with the Academic skeptics, Socrates (469–399 BC) and Cicero (106–43 BC), who were frequently cited as authorities by Scottish philosophers.[8] Hume stated, "Were Authorities proper to be employed in any Philosophical Reasoning, I could cite you that of *Socrates* the wisest and most religious of the *Greek* philosophers, as well as *Cicero* among the *Romans*, who both of them carried their Philosophical Doubts to the highest Degree of Scepticism" (LG 21).

The brand of skepticism forwarded by Socrates and Cicero in the ancient world did not appear to threaten religion. After all, Cicero defended Socrates's argument for the immateriality of the soul.[9] He articulated a version of the design argument for God's existence.[10] And he grounded morals in the natural law.[11] It would seem safe, then, for Hume, who operated in a highly religious context, to describe his system of thought as a version of this "*mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy" (EHU 12.24).[12]

Hume was familiar with Cicero's *Academica*, in which Cicero stated, "I am burning with the desire to discover the truth."[13] Hume portrayed this zeal, or "love of truth," as the guiding passion of the Academic philosophy (EHU 5.1). And this led Hume to prize intellectual integrity, to follow no master—only the evidence—and to hold all views with a "degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty." By adhering to these skeptical principles, Hume thought it possible to avoid the kind of credulity that often leads individuals headlong into falsehood.

But there were two kinds of ancient skepticism: Academic and Pyrrhonian. Whereas the Academic skeptics held opinions, adhering to probable truths, the Pyrrhonian skeptics were more radical, suspending judgment on all matters.[14] Hume dismissed this excessive brand of skepticism, which he portrayed as "entirely subversive of all speculation, and even action" (EHU 1.14). Because "mankind . . . must act and reason and believe" (EHU 12.23), he argued that the suspension of belief can only serve to launch people "into a momentary amazement and confusion" (DNR 1.6, 34).

But Hume did adhere to one element of Pyrrhonian skepticism, namely, that which called for the limitation of all inquiries to common life.[15] In other words, he made theoretical and practical judgments according to the appearances of everyday life, observing "what is commonly done" (T 1.4.7.7). Hume regarded this common-life limit as "the natural result of Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples" (EHU 12.25).[16] This element of radical skepticism in Hume's philosophy served as a tool by which to preclude any venture into the supernatural, which Hume considered "beyond the reach of human capacity" (EHU 8.1). There is no question that Hume wanted to free philosophy from its traditional role as theology's handmaiden. The common-life aspect of Hume's skepticism protected against any potential reversion to Platonic Ideas, substance metaphysics, or natural theology, all forms of "abstruse philosophy" that Hume portrayed "as a shelter to superstition" (EHU 1.17).[17]

Hume's skepticism therefore combined the intellectual integrity and moderation defended by the Academics and the limitations to inquiry defended by the Pyrrhonians. But Hume was also a thoroughgoing empiricist. This is where he seems to depart from the ancients. Cicero, for example, practiced the Socratic art of dialectic, attempting "to discover the truth by the method of arguing both for and against all the schools."[18] Rather than relying on for-and-against argumentation, Hume supposed that the cautious employment of the experimental method in common life was the best way "to establish . . . a science . . . much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension" (T Intro.10). In this way, Hume integrated skepticism and empiricism. And he did so to free philosophy from enslavement to theology and superstition. This attempt to *despiritualize* the world seems entirely modern, but it, too, has an ancient precedent.

Epicurus (341–270 BC), who despised Socratic dialectic, engaged in a strictly empirical method for a precise purpose, namely, to free individuals

from fear of the gods.[19] Epicurus wrote that "all reasoning depends on the sense-perceptions" and "all ideas are formed from sense-perceptions."[20] Although Hume was not a dogmatist who thought all impressions were true, he nevertheless trusted the senses, describing them as "the clearest and most convincing of all Evidences" (LG 22). Unconcerned with finding the essences or substantial forms of things, which he thought was impossible, Hume aimed to locate the regularities of phenomena through experience and observation. This is consistent with Newtonianism, but it is also consistent with the skeptical neo-Epicureanism of Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), who revived Epicurean thought in the seventeenth century.[21]

The resurgence of Epicurean philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perhaps surprisingly, contributed to the development of liberal political doctrine. Lisa Sarasohn, with good reason, has presented Gassendi as "a precursor of political liberalism."[22] And Catherine Wilson, commenting on the widespread modern embrace of Epicurean perspectives on morals, politics, and even scientific investigation, has declared, "We are all, in a sense, Epicureans now."[23] And one way that Epicurean doctrine has oriented the modern political imagination is by means of social contract theory.

## THE EPICUREAN ORIGINS OF SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Liberal political theory continues to derive inspiration from the idea of the social contract, which John Rawls (1921–2002) deployed in his epochal books, *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and *Political Liberalism* (1993). Interestingly, Alasdair MacIntyre ascertained that "the ghost of Hume" walked through Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*.[24] MacIntyre spotted Hume's specter in that text, because few philosophers played a greater role in popularizing what Rawls called the "familiar" way of thinking about justice and society than Hume did. Rawls suggested that this familiar, liberal way of thinking about justice and society was embedded in the background culture of Western liberal democracies. And he acknowledged that this approach to justice and society possessed a discernible philosophical heritage. In his early essay "Justice as Fairness" (1958), Rawls argued that the approach to justice and society characteristic of the social contract tradition can be found in Glaucon's remarks in book 2 of Plato's *Republic*, in

Epicurus's *Principal Doctrines*, in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, in Pufendorf's *De iure naturae et gentium*, and in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*.[25]

At first glance, this list hardly seems coherent. For one, it is unclear how Hobbes's approach to morals and politics is connected to the writings of Plato (427–347 BC) or to Epicurus, since Hobbes's philosophy is renowned for its striking departure from the philosophy of the ancients.[26] Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94), meanwhile, was a Protestant natural law theorist who railed against Hobbes. Hume, moreover, distanced himself from both Hobbes's dogmatism and Pufendorf's natural law theory. And more important, Hume earned a reputation as one of the greatest critics of the social contract. How, then, did a critic of the social contract make his way onto Rawls's list of contractarians?

The answer, it seems, is this: the thinkers on Rawls's list are connected by their reputed affiliation with Epicurean social thought.[27] In his *Principal Doctrines*, Epicurus taught that justice is a human creation, the result of a utility-calculation performed by individuals desiring to move from a state of conflict to a state of peace.[28] And this creation of justice through a pact, or agreement, garnering universal consent, is what carries individuals from a wretched primitive condition to peaceful coexistence. It constitutes a sort of political salvation.

This social contract narrative tells us what justice is, how and why it came into existence. It informs us what society is, how it came to be, and why. To the extent that the social contract narrative breathes life into contemporary liberal theory, it shapes our political self-understanding, our modes of discourse and social cooperation. It orients what we say, what we pursue, and what we prohibit in political life.

Insofar as the contract narrative constitutes an origin story, it serves a mythical function. MacIntyre observes that "there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things."[29] Similarly, Gerald Bruns argues that "only stories can show what it is to be a human being, have a character and pursue the good of that character. Narrative, one might say, is foundational for moral philosophy."[30] Arguably, story, in the form of the social contract narrative, is foundational for political philosophy also. And this book treats the social contract as mythical in this sense. Even though it is expressed in different forms, depending on the time and place in which it

is articulated, the contract narrative provides a mythical portrayal of the origin and purpose of justice and society that serves as a focal point for public deliberation on social and political matters.

## POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND THE IDEA OF PUBLIC REASON

The idea of the social contract played a significant role in early modern political philosophy, particularly in the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704). These philosophers utilized the social contract to promote peace by settling, or sidestepping, the intense religious disputes that raged during the European wars of religion (1517–1648) and the English civil wars (1642–51). When Rawls revisited social contract theory, he did so on the assumption that even though individuals possess diverse moral and religious views, they can agree on politics.

The threat of religious war, of bloody conflict over first principles, still haunts the modern political imagination. Philosophers who articulated classical liberal doctrine did so when the Protestant Reformation, which divided Western Europe into a multitude of religious sects vying for power with violence and persecutory zeal, was only recent history. Thus, when Hobbes and Locke used the social contract as a theoretical means by which to escape ceaseless civil and religious war in England, they inaugurated a way of thinking about justice and society that we would now call "liberal."

The term, "liberal," as Charles Larmore points out, "arrived late on the scene" of Western history. It sprouted at a specific historical moment in which a plurality of views of truth and the good life began to be held by people within political society. And the prospect of agreement on such matters appeared especially unlikely. The term "liberal," then, is "an historical category designating the practices Western societies have devised for dealing with reasonable disagreement about the human good."[31] Subsequently, the aim of political liberalism today, as Rawls expressed it, is to justify political order by a procedure independent of "opposing and conflicting philosophical and religious doctrines."[32]

Contemporary political liberalism—as articulated by Rawls, Larmore, and Martha Nussbaum—continues "the cause" of classical liberalism.[33] Under the doctrine of political liberalism, citizens are called to extend the scope of toleration and restrict the scope of political discourse. This

restricted scope of political discourse precludes robust public debate on true and false religion, true and false philosophy, and better and worse ways of life. These maneuvers are meant to protect public political life from the dangers posed by dogmatic religious and philosophic enthusiasts seeking to impose their views of the good life on others.[34]

This liberal mindset determines how we in the contemporary West are accustomed to engaging in public political debate. We are used to engaging in debates regarding the principles of justice that ground economic and political liberty. We are used to engaging in debate over the means by which to promote equal opportunity, reduce inequality, and protect the free actions of individuals pursuing their own rational life-plans. We are used to acquiescing to each person's right to equal respect, which, according to political liberal doctrine, demands that we tolerate any and all ways of life that do not infringe upon other—equally valid—ways of life.[35]

Thus, any defense of public law based on what is truly, objectively, and universally good for human beings is impermissible. Such a justification does not, according to the doctrine of political liberalism, even qualify as "public reason" or "common human reason." Any public debate over the nature of the cosmos or the possibility of a providential, or teleological, universal order would, of course, have implications for the nature, goals, and structure of society and the type of behavior incentivized within society. But these kinds of ideas are barred entrance into public discussion, since they are allegedly immune from garnering universal consent.[36]

## THE PROBLEM WITH POLITICAL LIBERALISM

It is unclear, though, whether these rigid limitations on public political debate are derived from anything like public consent. And according to political liberal doctrine, consent is the only thing that can legitimize coercion in the public arena. Although political liberalism is supposed to prevent illegitimate political coercion, that is to say, coercion informed by any one comprehensive philosophic, moral, or religious doctrine, it is unable to prevent such coercion, because political liberalism is itself the descendant of a controversial and comprehensive doctrine.[37] This philosophic doctrine, ancient in origin, is entwined with the social contract theory. And social contract theory, as Rawls pointed out, is at the heart of contemporary liberal theory and game theory, alike.

The modern political imagination has been shaped by the Protestant Reformation, the ensuing religious wars, the scientific revolution, the centralization of the state, and the rise of commercial society, but it has also been shaped by an accompanying theoretical orientation. That orientation is an Epicurean one.

Social contract theory, ancient in origin, incorporates elements of the metaphysical and ethical vision of the Epicurean philosophy in which it was birthed.[38] As a result, the modern political imagination, which has been shaped by social contract theory, assumes much more about the nature of man, society, and the cosmos than is often supposed. The Epicurean philosophical framework—with its empirical method of investigation, its political conventionalism, and its hedonistic theory of morals—did not always dominate in the West. But Hume's own appropriation of this Epicurean framework is an important part of the story of how this philosophical vision captured the Western political mind. And this is the story this book will tell.

## THE ARGUMENT OF THIS BOOK

Before launching into this story, it will be helpful to explain why Hume is the central figure and then to describe how the story will unfold in the ensuing chapters. To state it plainly, Hume articulated an outlook on morals and politics that would lead pivotal philosophers in the West, during the last two and a half centuries, to claim him as their own. For example, Hume used both utilitarian and contractarian language. And these two idioms, according to Rawls, represent the two major strands of liberal political theory. Utilitarians, including Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73), built upon Hume's notion of utility—which Mill traced back to Epicurus. Rawls, the contractarian, meanwhile, built on Hume's description of utility not as that which maximizes the happiness of the greatest number, but as a principle promoting the "well-being of every individual."[39]

Furthermore, in accord with the modern understanding of "liberal" and "conservative"—which derives from the French Estates General of 1789, in the early days of the French Revolution, when the "progressive" Third Estate sat on the left of the king and the "reactionary" nobility sat on the right of the king—scholars have interpreted Hume both as an early

liberal, that is, a predecessor to nineteenth-century British social reformers, and as the first conservative, who, along with Edmund Burke (1729–97), provided the theoretical basis for resisting radical reform.[40] Both the Left and the Right, in this modern sense, can locate their beginnings in part from the political outlook articulated by Hume.[41]

By the end of this book, the reader should come away with an understanding of Hume's philosophy and the context in which he wrote. In addition, the reader should gain familiarity both with some of Hume's predecessors, particularly those who laid the groundwork for a liberal outlook on justice and society, and with some of those, writing after Hume, who incorporated Hume's insights into their own respective moral and political visions. This, at least, is my intention.

Part 1 describes the starting point for the social contract narrative, which is the despiritualizing of the world. Chapter 1 details Hume's comprehensive critique of religion. Chapter 2 examines how philosophers, who submitted to the Epicurean temptation of despiritualizing the world, began crafting a new political science. Hume's effort to reduce politics to a science followed upon the efforts of Gassendi, Hobbes, Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), and Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) to cleanse philosophy and politics of theological speculation.

Part 2 examines liberalism's founding myth, the social contract narrative, which represents an alternative to the classical Christian conception of moral and political life. The social contract narrative is based upon the critique of religion, particularly of the Christian worldview. In a way, it serves as a replacement for the Christian narrative of humanity's origin and end. In the early modern period, this Christian worldview had as its support classical Greek philosophy as it had originated with Socrates and developed in the writings of Plato, Aristotle (384–322 BC), and Zeno (335–263 BC). The social contract tradition, then, repudiates not only the Hebrew and Christian moral and political vision, deriving from Jerusalem, but also the classical moral and political vision of Athens, which had been incorporated into Rome through the writings of Cicero and Seneca (4 BC–65 AD).

Part 2 focuses exclusively on Hume's moral and political thought because he is recognized, traditionally, as a critic of the social contract. But, as chapters 3 and 4 reveal, Hume wrote within a contractarian framework. He added to the contractarian imagination, in fact, by naturalizing the social

contract, by depicting human beings as the creators of justice, agreeing to terms of cooperation with one another for the sake of mutual advantage.

Part 3 explores the ways in which Hume contributed to the modern political imagination. In chapter 5, an examination of Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* and *History of England* uncovers how Hume has been interpreted both as a liberal reformer and as a conservative. The latter interpretation derives in many ways from Hume's reception in France during the early stages of the French Revolution. Chapter 6, meanwhile, considers how the contractarian vision of Rawls, and the notion of "public reason" with which it is associated, depends on a broader conception of life and the good than is often recognized. As a result, when we think and speak about politics—in a manner consistent with this liberal idea of public reason—we, without necessarily noticing, are thinking and speaking in philosophical terms. In other words, there is no kind of public political discourse that is "strictly political." I contend that, by gaining insight into Hume's political theory, which has shaped the imagination of utilitarians and contractarians, of liberals and conservatives, we are better positioned to spot the assumptions we make about man, God, and nature when we think and speak politically.

## INTRODUCING HUME

Hume's first book, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, was published when he was approaching the age of thirty. He was disappointed by its reception, claiming in his short autobiography that it had fallen "*dead-born from the press*" (E-MOL xxxiv). "I had always entertained a notion," Hume mused, "that my want of success in publishing the Treatise of Human Nature, had proceeded more from the manner than the matter; and that I had been guilty of a very usual indiscretion, in going to the press too early" (E-MOL xxxv). A precocious lad, Hume had planned out the *Treatise*, "so vast an undertaking," "before I was one and twenty" (L 1:158). Aside from working briefly as a merchant's clerk in Bristol in 1734, Hume spent the 1730s traveling, reading, and writing his *Treatise*, whether at Ninewells, his family home in Scotland, in La Flèche, France, or in London. Shortly after the first two books of the *Treatise*, "Of the Understanding" and "Of the Passions," were released in late January 1739, Hume composed the *Abstract of A Treatise of*

*Human Nature*, published anonymously in 1740, which was designed to reproduce the arguments of the work with more clarity.

In November 1740, the third book of the *Treatise*, "Of Morals," was published. As the first reviewer of book 3 observed, Hume dealt with the important matter of "the happiness of mankind . . . [and he] intended to be heard by everybody." Hume declared in the announcement for book 3 of the *Treatise* that he hoped to gain an audience among "ordinary readers." This initial reviewer contended that Hume would have to continue to refine his language, making it simpler and clearer, if he wanted to achieve his goal of "reform[ing] the ideas of almost all mankind." As it stood, however, Hume's "metaphysics" remained "a little obscure." There was simply too much sublimity, too much abstruse speculation, to connect with the common man, who was evidently the target audience of the *Treatise*. Hume must have taken this message to heart, because he worked for the rest of his life to communicate his revolutionary philosophical system to "ordinary readers."[42] And he eventually gained a hearing among philosophers and ordinary readers, alike, in Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and beyond.

In 1741 and 1742, Hume released two volumes of essays (*Essays Moral and Political*). The first consisted of fifteen essays. The second contained twelve. These essays, meant for popular consumption, were "favourably received," as Hume noted.[43] Given the success of this venture, he forgot his "former disappointment" and set out to recast his philosophy in a more digestible, short-essay format that was far less burdensome than that of the dense and lengthy *Treatise* (E-MOL xxxiv).[44] John B. Stewart wisely argued that we should interpret Hume's later writings not as "radically new undertakings," but instead "as applications and extrapolations of the principles set forth in the *Treatise*."[45]

For the remainder of his career, Hume revised the *Treatise*, not because he was displeased with what he said, but because he was displeased with how he said it. Although, toward the end of his life, Hume judged the *Treatise* to be a defective, "juvenile work," he never renounced its contents.[46] In fact, just after having written *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), a reformulation of book 3 of the *Treatise* that Hume described as "incomparably" his best work, he reported to his friend Gilbert Elliot that a comparison of the *Treatise* and this second *Enquiry* would show that "the philosophical principles are the same in both" (L

1:158). Again, to John Stewart, Hume admitted that the second *Enquiry* possessed "the same doctrines [as the *Treatise*], better illustrated & exprest" (L 1:187). In all of his philosophical works, Hume expounded upon the same philosophical program that he conceived in his early years and first delineated in the *Treatise*. And Hume regarded his popular essays, too, as "philosophical writings."[47] They appeared alongside his *Enquiries* and "Natural History of Religion" (1757) in his collected works, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, first published in 1753. *The History of England* (1754–62), too, although it dealt with more concrete circumstances, gave Hume an opportunity to apply his philosophy to real-world scenarios.[48] Hume's writings, taken as a whole, constitute what Stewart called "a summa of the moral sciences," a unified system of thought expressing the intellectual foundations of a modern way of life.[49]

In the latter stage of Hume's writing career, his reputation waxed in part because of his stylistic excellence. William Rose (1719–86) of the *Monthly Review* lauded Hume for the "propriety, elegance and spirit" of his writing and for the "clearness and precision of ideas" contained therein. "There is a delicacy of sentiment," Rose said, "an original turn of thought, a perspicuity, and often an elegance, of language, that cannot but recommend his writings to every reader of taste."[50] Abbé Le Blanc, who translated Hume's *Political Discourses* (1752) into French, compared Hume's political thought to Montesquieu's, as expressed in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748).[51] Le Blanc reportedly said to Hume, "You are the only one in Europe who can replace M. le Président de Montesquieu."[52]

According to Hume's biographer Ernest C. Mossner, after Montesquieu's death in 1757, Hume was "generally acknowledged to be the leading man of letters, not only of North Britain, but of South Britain as well; and, on the Continent, the unrivalled inheritor of the mantle of Montesquieu." Mossner noted, however, that there were two interpretations of Hume prevalent among his contemporaries. Hume's "sudden acclaim was not . . . without its negative side," Mossner wrote, "for in certain quarters Hume was considered rather as the inheritor of the mantle of notoriety worn in the seventeenth century by Hobbes, and more recently by Mandeville."[53]

Americans, too, tended to portray Hume as an irreligious philosopher, whose writings, like Hobbes's and Mandeville's before him, posed a threat to the moral and social order. Abigail Adams, in a letter to her husband, John Adams, in 1783, referred to both Hume and Mandeville as proponents of

infidelity, whose works should not be included in a college curriculum intending to shape the moral and spiritual development of young adults. Abigail declared:

> I have a thousand fears for my dear Boys as they rise into Life, the most critical period of which is I conceive, at the university; there infidelity abounds, both in example and precepts, there they imbibe the specious arguments of a Voltaire a Hume and Mandevill. If not from the fountain, they receive them at second hand. These are well calculated to intice a youth, not yet capable of investigating their principles, or answering their arguments. Thus is a youth puzzled in Mazes and perplexed with error until he is led to doubt, and from doubt to disbelief.[54]

Modern accounts of Hume's philosophy indicate that Abigail, given her viewpoint, was right to worry that her boys might read Hume. James A. Harris, for example, has referred to Hume's philosophy as a "wholesale rejection of the Stoic picture of man," including the ideas of providence and natural sociability, which were central to the philosophy of the Christian neo-Stoic Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746).[55] Annette Baier has gone so far as to describe Hume's second *Enquiry* as an "anti-Christian manifesto."[56] And Paul Russell has presented Hume's philosophy as an irreligious one, of a specifically "Lucretian" cast.[57] And it is with Hume's critique of religion that this story begins.

PART 1

# Despiritualizing the World

ONE

# Hume's Critique of Religion

Hume viewed the kind of popular Christianity that reigned in eighteenth-century Great Britain as a pernicious superstition. Adopting a stance that was controversial at the time, Hume argued that religion, in general, and Christianity, in particular, was not the source of moral distinctions. He thought that traditional Christian theism—which includes belief in a personal, providential, and morally perfect Creator God who implements perfect justice in the afterlife—was irrelevant, at best, and harmful, at worst, to the improvement of morals. For this reason, he held that the Christianity to which the vulgar masses adhered—whether Anglicanism in England, Calvinist Presbyterianism in Scotland, or Roman Catholicism in France and elsewhere in Europe—proved detrimental to public peace and happiness.

There is no question that Hume was interested in promoting good morals, writing in the second *Enquiry* that the "end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty; and, by proper representations of the deformity of vice and beauty of virtue, beget correspondent habits, and engage us to avoid the one, and embrace the other" (EHU 1.6).

Hume was not entirely consistent, though, on the relationship between belief and morals. He often argued that metaphysics has little to do

with morality. According to Hume, an individual's virtue—his integrity, justice, or industry, for example—does not depend on his belief system. He can be virtuous regardless of what he believes about the creation of the world, the character of God, or the possibility of an afterlife. An individual can know, for example, that honesty is a virtue, and dishonesty a vice, purely through the operation of his sentiments, his felt reactions, when encountering these character traits in his daily life. The sight of the honest man gives him pleasure. The sight of the dishonest man gives him pain. This is a natural phenomenon, not a supernatural one. It is rooted in the sentiments, not reason. Moral distinctions, for Hume, depend on "some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species" (EHU 1.9).

Hume thought our motives to virtue, moreover, concern our temporal well-being, alone. He explained that a man exercises, because he wants to be healthy, to be able to work and earn money, which is an "instrument of pleasure." He also exercises because he wants to avoid sickness, which is painful. The pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the ultimate aims of his actions (EPM App. 1.18–19). The same aims inspire virtuous dispositions. An individual might be inclined to act honestly for the pleasure of maintaining a good reputation or to act industriously for the pleasure of getting ahead in life. For this reason, when responding to Hutcheson's critiques of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume concluded that, in the normal case, "I do not think [a man's] Character depends upon his philosophical Speculations" (L 1:34).

Twelve years later, Hume wrote to his friend Gilbert Elliot of Minto defending the contents of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. He maintained the same stance he expressed to Hutcheson—a stance that is central to his philosophical enterprise—that morality is not derived from abstract reasoning and cannot be threatened by radical questioning into the nature of religion. In response to anyone who might take offense at his skeptical inquiry into the existence and nature of God in the *Dialogues*, Hume flippantly asked: "What Danger can ever come from ingenious Reasoning & Enquiry?"

But in the next sentence, Hume flatly pronounced that "the worst speculative Sceptic ever I knew, was a much better Man than the best superstitious Devotee & Bigot."[1] Hume, with this statement, went beyond arguing that it is possible for an atheist to be virtuous and contended—like Bayle and Mandeville before him—that the speculative atheist is ac-

tually morally superior to the "ignorant" and "illiterate" "modern zealot" (L 1:153–55). If it is true, then, that incorrect beliefs—based on the principles of Christian theism, for example—tend not only toward private unhappiness but also, as the skeptic Philo explained in the *Dialogues*, toward "factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression, slavery" (DNR 12.11–13, 122), then beliefs certainly do matter. Some are better for society. Some are worse.

If religious beliefs corrupt the moral sentiments and engender public disorder, then it would be incumbent on a philosopher such as Hume, who desired to promote stability in government and advancement in the arts and sciences, to promote more correct beliefs, attained by means of an accurate philosophical method. By penetrating polite society, this method, as he indicated in the first *Enquiry*, might contribute to a salubrious social life. And this is why he suggested that we limit our sphere of investigation to common life and common experience, so that we might abandon "airy sciences" and overcome "religious fears and prejudices." Hume sought to elucidate the principles of the mind and, in this way, to "cultivate true metaphysics, with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate" (EHU 1.10–15).

This means, however, that Hume's "science of man," which he regarded as foundational for the study of mathematics, natural philosophy, and natural religion (T Intro.4–5; DNR 1.13, 29), is designed not only to promote "true metaphysics" but also to destroy false metaphysics. Since "metaphysical jargon . . . mixed up with popular superstition" constituted the greatest obstacle to the promotion of "accurate and just reasoning" (EHU 1.12), Hume, as a precursor to his attempt to construct a positive philosophy, had to take a sledgehammer to the two pillars of traditional Christian theism—natural and revealed religion. Hume's full-throated, thoroughgoing critique of religion was a necessary component of his endeavor to promote sound philosophy, good morals, and stable government. For this reason, the critique of religion is an essential feature of Hume's political theory. In fact, it is the starting point.

## HUME'S REPUTATION AS THE GREAT INFIDEL

In *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757–58), John Brown, an English priest and essayist, bemoaned the effeminacy, corruption,

and luxury that had arisen in Great Britain. Brown attributed this state of affairs, in part, to Hume's and Mandeville's political theories, each of which attributed public peace and well-being to the pursuit of self-interest rather than faithfulness to the Christian religion. In a succeeding volume, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty* (1765), Brown asserted that Hume's writings served not only to privatize, but also to disprove the Christian religion, by undercutting the very basis of belief. "With a pen truly Epicurean," Brown observed, Hume, the author of "*Essays philosophical and moral* . . . undermines all the foundations of religion, revealed and natural."[2]

During the Enlightenment, Epicurus had served as the pagan patron saint of both atheism and materialism. According to Peter Gay, materialists, *libertins*, and *philosophes*, who constituted the Enlightenment's "erudite band of unbelievers," proudly adopted Epicurus and Lucretius (99–55 BC) as their favorite ancient authors, nimbly referencing their writings to dignify and embellish their own "witty impiety" and "lighthearted sensuality."[3] Gay famously included Hume in this circle of "modern pagans," describing *le bon David*—as he was known in France—as the "corpulent . . . favorite uncle in the philosophic family."[4] Hume, on Gay's interpretation, was not merely a friendly aide-de-camp to this company of atheistic materialists, someone who contributed to their cause by articulating a sound philosophy devoid of religious influence. Instead, he was the prime representative of radical Enlightenment, "the complete modern pagan."

Anecdotes from Hume's years in Paris, however, indicate that he may not have been the paragon of Enlightenment atheism that Gay supposed. When, on one night in the mid-1760s, Hume dined with this purported "family" of *philosophes*, he told Baron d'Holbach that he did not believe in atheists and had never seen any.[5] A surprised Holbach informed Hume that of the eighteen men of letters present in that very room, fifteen were atheists, and the other three simply "haven't made up their mind."[6] As this scene indicates, Hume, the skeptic, felt alienated from the dogmatic rationalists in France. One of Hume's contemporaries, Sir James Macdonald, when writing from France to a friend in England, expressed pity for the situation of "that poor Hume," who "on your side of the water was thought to have too little religion, [and] is here thought to have too much."[7]

Hume may have viewed himself as a diffident skeptic when he was around the stridently atheistic *philosophes*, but he was often reminded by his contemporaries in Great Britain that his brand of skepticism was not

far removed from full-fledged impiety. In 1745, Hume failed to obtain the position of professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh, in part because the Reverend William Wishart released a pamphlet, *A Specimen of the Principles concerning Religion and Morality, maintain'd in a Book lately publish'd, intituled, A Treatise of Human Nature*, accusing Hume of views "leading to downright atheism"—for example, the denial of the immateriality of the soul—and of "errors concerning the very being and existence of a God" (LG 17–18).[8] In the 1750s, the Orthodox Popular Party of the Scottish Church attempted to excommunicate Hume, even though he never considered himself part of the Scottish Church.

Members of the Scottish Church's Moderate Party, including Hugh Blair (1718–1800), William Robertson (1721–93), and Alexander Carlyle (1722–1805), were Hume's close and reliable friends throughout his lifetime, but they, by all accounts, preferred not to discuss religion with Hume. In a personal letter, Hume suggested that he and Blair limit their discussions to "literature or reasoning," topics that left Hume "entertained and instructed." Conversations about religion, on the other hand, no matter how tactfully Blair, the Moderate minister, might broach the subject, had in the past left Hume "tired" and Blair "angry" (L 1:351). Blair even noted in a letter that if Hume ever published the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* during Hume's lifetime that the *philosophes*, once having thought Hume insufficiently radical on religious matters, would hasten to erect a statue of Hume in Paris. "But," Blair begged Hume, "for Gods sake let that be a posthumous work, if ever it shall see the light: Tho' I really think it had better not" (NL 72–73).

In his last days, Hume seems to have had no qualms presenting himself in the same manner as the *philosophes*, as an irreligious disciple of Lucretius. In 1775, Hume had fallen ill with "a disorder in my bowels," perhaps colon cancer, which he eventually apprehended as "mortal and incurable" (E-MOL, xl).[9] In 1776, James Boswell, the Scottish biographer, visited Hume, his longtime friend, in part to discover whether Hume, the Great Infidel, would repent of his irreligiosity. Boswell "asked him if the thought of annihilation never gave him any uneasiness. He said not the least; no more than the thought that he had not been, as Lucretius observes."[10] Hume confirmed, in his final interview with Boswell, that, since he was young, "he never had entertained any belief in religion."[11] And Hume persisted in assuming that "the morality of every religion was

bad."[12] According to the report of Adam Smith (1723–90), Hume expressed regret that before his death he would not be alive to witness the disappearance of all traces of superstition, as "the churches [are] shut up, and the clergy sent about their business."[13]

The public took immense interest in the circumstances surrounding Hume's death in 1776. The *Monthly Review* announced, in its preface to its publication of "My Own Life," Hume's autobiography: "When men of such parts, and such principles, as those which distinguished the character and writings of Mr. Hume, come to face the immediate terrors of death, the world is always curious to learn in what manner they support the trying conflict."[14]

His neighboring Scots viewed Hume, Europe's most famous man of letters, as a notorious "atheist."[15] In one humorous anecdote, which Hume liked to repeat at dinner parties, a group of Edinburgh fishwives, considering Hume a "wicked unbeliever," refused to help him out of a bog in which he had fallen until he recited the Lord's Prayer.[16] As this story indicates, the Scottish public was aware of Hume's religious skepticism. And it received news of Hume's deteriorating health with rapt attention.

The Scottish people wondered whether Hume might repent of his irreligious views before death. They treated his deathbed behavior as a test case for whether a person who rejected divine providence and the immortality of the soul, which, in Hume's day, was the equivalent of atheism, could die well. Hume, meanwhile, by reportedly maintaining equanimity in the face of death, used the circumstances of his death to make a practical public statement of sorts in defense of the possibility of virtuous atheism. In his last days, he sought to live out the theme that pervaded his moral writings: that a person does not need natural or revealed religion to lead a virtuous and happy life. In fact, Hume scholar Paul Russell has described this theme as *the* guiding practical aim of Hume's "philosophy of irreligion." Hume's attempt "to discredit and dislodge the role of religion in human life," was, in Russell's words, Hume's "Lucretian mission."[17]

Shortly after Hume's death, Adam Smith declared that Hume approached "as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit" (L 2:452). This statement caused a scandal among Smith's contemporaries, because it served as a vindication, as Dennis Rasmussen writes in his excellent account of

Hume's and Smith's friendship, "of the possibility and morality of a life without religion."[18] This very idea struck Boswell as "daring effrontery."[19] The Scottish writer John Ramsay observed that Hume's alleged tranquility as he approached death—combined with his sustained antipathy toward superstition—made him resemble none other than Epicurus. Ramsay made the connection directly, reporting that "Dr. [Adam] Smith met with a very severe shock from the death of Mr. David Hume after a tedious illness, which he bore with a fortitude and cheerfulness which would not have misbecome Epicurus himself." Hume's skepticism regarding not only the intellectual viability, but also the practical necessity of religion "shocked every sober Christian" at the time, according to Ramsay.[20]

## THE MEANING OF ATHEISM IN SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

The way the Scottish public, along with orthodox members of the Scottish Church, responded to Hume's perceived irreligion is highly reminiscent of the Anglican response to Hobbes's irreligious views. For Anglican divines of the seventeenth century especially, these views, representing the peak of atheism, posed a serious threat to the Christian religion, which they argued was central to promoting good morals and a good society. In fact, as Kenneth Sheppard has ably documented, many of Hobbes's contemporaries saw him as the "reincarnation" of those "ancient atheists," Epicurus and Lucretius, those figures so lauded by the *philosophes*.[21]

The recovery of Lucretius's didactic Epicurean poem, *De rerum natura*, during the Renaissance produced a surge in atheistic literature in Europe.[22] In *De rerum natura*, Lucretius, abiding by the ancient atomism of Democritus and Epicurus, argued that the random movement of atoms, rather than the rational direction of an eternal divine mind, is responsible for the order we perceive in the universe.[23] Lucretius also maintained that religious belief arises from ignorance, hope, and fear.[24] The purpose of Epicurean philosophy is to silence the religious impulse, to enlighten individuals, and, as a result, to free them from the dread caused by superstitious fear, particularly fear of the afterlife. Lucretius did acknowledge that the gods exist, but he believed that atoms—not the gods—are indivisible, infinite, and eternal. Lucretius famously robbed the gods of any providential care or

concern for humanity, arguing instead that the gods exist in a state of blissful indifference to earthly affairs, which is the reason they enjoy an exemplary form of tranquility, or happiness. The gods, in the Epicurean account, should be emulated, not feared. The Epicurean gods are not eternal, nor do they have charge over earthly affairs. They are, in effect, no gods at all.[25]

Sheppard has noted that the reproduction of Lucretius's poem, together with the prominence of Hobbes's philosophy, struck many leading theologians in seventeenth-century England as confirmation of "an Epicurean and atheist epidemic."[26] This led to a surge in antiatheist literature, a series of polemical theological works designed to confute the atheistic systems of Lucretius and Hobbes, in particular. Lucretius and Hobbes by no means authored identical philosophical systems, but they represented a similar outlook, one characterized by materialist atheism and a psychological explanation of religion. J. G. A. Pocock has argued that antiatheist writings in England increased after the English civil wars as the Anglican clergy sought to restore order and reconstitute their authority over society, politics, and culture.[27] The clergymen responsible for the growth in atheist confutations during the Restoration and beyond—even into the reign of Queen Anne—treated Epicureanism and atheism as synonymous terms.[28] And these theologians tended to portray Hobbes as the "arch-atheist," the leading proponent of Epicurean atheism.[29] In this way, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Hobbes became the great atheist bugbears of the seventeenth century.

The first English edition of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (1675), reprinted several times, contained lengthy commentaries by the translator, Thomas Creech, in which he inveighed against Hobbes's "Epicurean" atheism. Creech represented the Royal Society's fusion of science and religion, or, more specifically, the new mechanistic science with the Christian doctrines of providence and the immateriality of the soul. One of Hobbes's fiercest critics, the Anglican theologian Richard Bentley (1662–1742), delivered the inaugural Boyle lectures, named after Robert Boyle (1627–91), a chief purveyor of the new experimental method and one of the founders of the Royal Society, an institution founded in 1660 and chartered by King Charles II. In these influential lectures, Bentley construed Epicurus as the prototypical atheist and Hobbes as his most prominent modern successor. According to Bentley, Hobbes's opposition to "the assertions of Providence," to "the immortality of the soul," and to "any

incorporeal substance" made him an "infidel," a philosophical materialist who believed that "mere body may produce cogitation and sense."[30]

Whereas the founders of the new experimental science, most notably Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Boyle, had defended the existence of immaterial substance, Hobbes, whom Catherine Wilson calls "the most thoroughgoing Democritean philosopher of the seventeenth century," explained all material and mental phenomena by means of matter and motion, without recourse to a spiritual realm or divine providence. This made him a "dogmatic atheist," particularly in the eyes of the Anglican establishment, whose views were represented by critics such as Bentley.[31]

Clearly, Bentley used the word "atheist" pejoratively here. And this was typical practice in the Republic of Letters. Philosophers used the term "atheist" to attack their opponents, to charge them with intellectual blindness and ethical folly.[32] Even though Hobbes maintained that there was a first cause of the universe, his critics still accused him of atheism, because Hobbes argued that human beings could know nothing about the first cause (except that it is corporeal, since, for Hobbes the only thing that exists is material substance). Hobbes argued that the attributes we assign to God, including justice, mercy, and perfection, are merely signs of respect, because we actually have no idea of God or of his character.[33] Thus, as Gianluca Mori explains in his study of early modern atheism, atheism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not imply the flat denial of a first cause. Instead, atheism was "the thesis that denies the existence of a first cause of the universe *endowed with supreme intelligence, freedom and design*" (emphasis mine).[34]

The focal point of debates between atheists and theists, then, was not the existence of the first cause, but the nature and activity of that cause. Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), an English philosopher and Anglican cleric, averred that the denial of the Deity's attributes and providential care of the universe was the equivalent of denying the existence of the Deity altogether. Clarke, an influential advocate of Newtonian physics who delivered the Boyle lectures in 1704–5, defined an atheist as anyone who denies either the being of God or "the principal attributes of the divine nature."[35] Clarke affirmed, moreover, that the "self-existent and original cause of all things must be an intelligent being. In this proposition lies the main question between us and the atheists."[36]

Richard Bentley had made this assertion twelve years earlier in his Boyle lectures, when he maintained that "the Existence of God and his Government of the World do mutually suppose and imply one another." Anyone who denies that God orders worldly affairs implicitly denies his existence. In other words, a supremely intelligent and benevolent designer of the universe must not only sustain the universe in being, but also express care and concern for his creation, particularly humanity. If human beings are made in the image of God, as traditional Christianity holds, then human beings can participate in God's creative and intelligent nature. They can come to know God and, by knowing God, come to know themselves. But if you remove the possibility of a supremely intelligent Creator God exercising providential care over the universe, then you remove rational warrant for the Christian understanding of God. Thus, the refrain "in the mouths of Atheistical Men," according to Bentley, is this: "*No Providence, therefore no God*."[37]

Atheism at this time consisted of an overt assault on the Christian understanding of God. And it aimed particularly to exclude the possibility of rational discourse about God and his attributes.[38] If human beings cannot, by virtue of natural reason, arrive at some knowledge of God's character or some understanding of the duties they owe God, then discussion about God's existence, attributes, and moral expectations are irrational enterprises that are neither public nor shareable. Such discussions belong neither to philosophy nor to public life. And when they do break into these realms, they cause serious turmoil. This is an essential lesson of Hume's writings on religion.

Critics of rational philosophical theism in Hume's day understood that a failure to attribute moral characteristics to the first cause would rob religion of its meaning and purpose. Religion, in this case, would ground neither moral distinctions nor moral obligations. After all, in what way could an unknowable, impersonal cause illuminate anything about human nature or morals? And what kind of moral duties might an individual owe to a first cause that might, for all we know, be impersonal, indifferent, or even evil?

Hume's atheism is, as Thomas Holden has called it, a "moral atheism" that rejects the notion of a God with moral attributes.[39] This entails, though, not only a rejection of the claim that God is benevolent, but also a rejection of the claim that God is a personal God whose nature can be described, even analogously, in human terms. This moral atheism, which, according to Holden, is a "central plank of his naturalistic and irreligious

agenda," is enough to prevent the Christian understanding of God from intruding upon Hume's philosophical investigations.[40] It permits Hume to investigate matters metaphysical, moral, political, economic, aesthetic, and historical without any reference to God, theology, or the spiritual realm. Since Hume did not think reason has anything to do with religion, or vice versa, he articulated an entirely despiritualized philosophy, as Hobbes had done a century earlier. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, then, can be described as an atheistic work, insofar as it denied that the Christian understanding of God can inform our understanding of personal identity, the regularity of nature, the faculties of the mind and their operation, or moral distinctions.

With the publication of the *Treatise* in 1739–40, Hume entered a philosophic world still bubbling with theist–atheist controversy. Pointing to the charges of atheism and irreligion unleashed on the author of the *Treatise* after its publication, Paul Russell writes, "The evidence suggests that at all levels of intellectual life the (main) debate concerning religion and atheism was just as active and vigorous in Scotland as it was in England."[41]

The Christian religion informed all aspects of daily life in Scotland, including the university, law, politics, and culture. As late as 1697, for example, an Edinburgh student, Thomas Aikenhead, was hanged for blasphemy under a Scottish law passed in 1695. Aikenhead had been accused not only of atheism but also of challenging the authority of scripture, by referring to the Old Testament as "Ezra's fables," which was, according to the indictment, "a profane allusion to Esop's fables."[42] This theory that the Hebrew scriptures were written not by Moses and the prophets, but by Ezra the Scribe, who returned to Jerusalem to teach the law after the Babylonian captivity, had been suggested by Hobbes, who, along with Spinoza, was one of the founders of historical biblical criticism.[43] In 1729, John Simson, professor of theology at the University of Glasgow, who exemplified the Moderate trend away from creedal focus on the Westminster Confession toward practical focus on good morals, was suspended with pay amid accusations that he denied the divinity of Christ in his lectures.[44] During Hume's lifetime, classes at the University of Edinburgh still began with prayer. Since education included spiritual and moral formation, and since the professor of moral philosophy was required to teach classes on pneumatology—the study of mind or spirit—it is no wonder that Hume, having been accused in 1744 of "Heresy, Deism, Scepticism, Athesim &c," was not hired (L 1:57).

By the early eighteenth century, the attack by Fellows of the Royal Society and other Anglican theologians on Hobbesian and Spinozist brands of atheism had given way to a new controversy in England between Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins on the existence of immaterial substance.[45] Andrew Baxter and William Dudgeon continued this debate in Scotland into the 1730s. The theists in these debates—Clarke and Baxter—maintained that immaterial substance (for example, the soul) is self-moving, responsible for thought and action, and that material substance is inert. The freethinkers in these debates—Collins and Dudgeon—argued that motion is essential to matter. Matter is always in motion, according to these freethinkers, which means that there is no need to reference an immaterial God as that which is responsible for universal order or an immaterial soul as that which is responsible for human thought and action.

Dudgeon's heterodox views attracted the attention of the local Chirnside Presbyters. Hume grew up in his family home in Ninewells, in the village of Chirnside, near where Dudgeon worked as a tenant farmer. And in the 1730s, the Chirnside Presbyters—which included Hume's uncle George Home—investigated Dudgeon for "gross errors, subversive of all religion, and in direct contradiction to the Holy Scriptures."[46] In these years, as Hume's intellectual biographer James A. Harris notes, religious traditionalists in Scotland "made moves to stem an inflowing tide of new and, as they saw it, ungodly ideas" that threatened "Scotland's claim to be a nation singled out by God for special favour."[47] It was this mindset that motivated the Scottish minister John Bonar (1722–61) to write a pamphlet advocating for the censuring of Hume by the General Assembly in 1755. Bonar explained that "it is the business of an established church, to employ that power with which she is invested, in promoting purity of faith, and sanctity of manners."[48]

In his writings on religion, Hume touched upon many of the same questions treated by theists and freethinkers. And he repeatedly landed on the side of the freethinkers when the two were in conflict, as Hume explicitly acknowledged in one notable section in the *Treatise* (T 1.4.5.33). Hume argued that we have no innate idea of God and that we have no rational means by which to grasp his attributes. And although he held that there is a first cause, he argued that we cannot know whether this cause is one or many, intelligent or stupid, benevolent or evil. He held that religion

derives from the passions, so that theology is primarily an irrational rather than a rational enterprise. And he observed that the most likely explanation for the regular order present in the universe is that matter moves necessarily, of its own accord, not under the guidance of an invisible, supreme intelligence. On this *essential question*, then, of whether mind moves matter or matter moves necessarily, Hume assented to the probability of the latter. It is no accident that Hume agreed with Hobbes on this point. As Paul Russell has persuasively argued, it was Hume's intention "to refute the claims of Christian metaphysics and ethics and to construct a secular moral and political outlook" modeled after that of Hobbes.[49]

Hume frequently repeated the arguments of freethinkers, but he tried not to be dogmatic about it. In fact, Hume, the skeptic, explicitly denounced Hobbes's dogmatism.[50] Nevertheless, as the earliest reviews of the *Treatise* indicated, Hume himself was dogmatic to some extent, particularly in regard to his critique of religion. Although Hume allowed that it was probable there is a first cause, he stated in no uncertain terms that no one could ever establish an a priori proof of the existence of a Deity, like that which had been articulated by Clarke. And the reviewer of the *Treatise* in the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée* (1740) made note of this, writing that the author of the *Treatise* "is not in doubt when he advances the argument, for example, that it is false that everything that exists must necessarily have a cause of its existence; that we have *a priori* no proof of the existence of the Deity."[51] The following year, the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée* published a review of book 3 of the *Treatise*, the section on morals and politics. And this time, the reviewer observed that the *Treatise* contained "Hobbes's system presented in new form." But "had this philosopher presented it in this manner, I doubt that he would have been welcomed into the world."[52]

Hume's epistemic stance, like Hobbes's, precluded the possibility that humans might rationally grasp God's attributes. In a letter to Mure, Hume compared God to "a remote ancestor, who has left us estates & honors, acquir'd with virtue, is a great benefactor, & yet 'tis impossible to bear him any affection, because unknown to us; tho' in general we know him to be a man or a human creature, which brings him vastly nearer our comprehension than an invisible infinite Spirit." As a result of "this circumstance of the invisibility & incomprehensibility of the Deity [we] may feel no affection towards him." Enthusiasts, then, "mightily deceive themselves"—and prove themselves agitated by "hope & fear"—when they act as if they can

know, love, or feel affection for a Deity of which they have no experience nor access via "the senses or imagination" (L 1:50–51).

Ralph Cudworth (1617–88), the Cambridge Platonist whose *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) constituted a magisterial assault on the varieties of atheism, faulted Hobbes for this view that denies that we can know, by the exercise of natural reason, whether God is providential or morally praiseworthy.[53] In *Leviathan*, Hobbes—portrayed by Cudworth as a representative of "Modern Atheistick Writers"—had ruled out any knowledge of God because God is inaccessible to the senses or to the imagination.[54] Cudworth argued, however, that the universe reflected the plan of a divine architect: "If there be *physis* [nature], then there must be *nous* [intellect]."[55] But Hobbes robbed the universe of precisely this kind of rational planning and explained everything by means of matter in motion. For Hobbes, and the freethinkers in general, thought does not precede matter. Matter precedes thought. Hume knew Cudworth's arguments well, having encountered them when he was in France writing the *Treatise*.[56] And even though Hume did not qualify as a philosophical materialist because he did not articulate a substance ontology (in fact, he criticized it), he would have known he was adopting philosophical views reminiscent of Hobbes's much maligned atheism. And orthodox Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians treated him as a new Hobbes for this reason.

Although Hume's contemporaries certainly noticed his personal and philosophical antipathy toward traditional Christian religion, scholars have continued to debate his philosophical treatment of religion, describing Hume as everything from an unyielding atheist to an attenuated deist and even a philosophical theist.[57] And it is true that even though Hume precluded the possibility of divine providence, he left the door open to the existence of the deity. In the letter to Mure, Hume mentioned that true religion consisted of "the practice of morality, and the assent of the understanding to the proposition *that God exists*" (L 1:50). Whether Hume thought there was enough evidence to assent to this proposition is an open question that will be assessed in the remainder of this chapter. As the reactions to Hume's writings indicate, though, it appears, even from the most generous reading of Hume's philosophy, that his philosophy provides no epistemic warrant for belief in the Christian God. Hume's philosophy blocks any avenue toward knowledge of the Christian God, whether by natural or revealed religion.

## HUME'S SYSTEMATIC REFUTATION OF CHRISTIAN THEISM

James Beattie (1735–1803), one of the most fiery and implacable of Hume's critics—to whom Hume referred as "that bigoted silly fellow"—designated Hume a speculative and practical atheist (L 2:301). Hume acted as if he were not bothered by Beattie's attack, but he was rumored to "fly out into a transport of passion and swearing" at the sound of his name.[58] In Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (1770), an unrelenting attack on Hume's philosophy that went through six editions in eight years—earning Beattie instant fame—Beattie argued that Hume "hath exerted his great talents, and employed several years of his life, in endeavouring to persuade the world, that the fundamental doctrines of natural religion are irrational, the proofs of revealed religion such as ought not to satisfy an impartial mind."[59] Hume not only attempted to bring natural and revealed religion into disrepute, Beattie argued, but also tried to free morality from religious foundations in the first *Enquiry*'s "Essay on a Particular Providence and a Future State." This essay, Beattie boomed, should truly be titled "An attempt to vindicate atheism." And Beattie specified what he meant by atheism. A speculative atheist, according to Beattie, is someone who does not believe in the being of God or "thinks it inconsistent with sound reason" that "the great First Cause is perfect in holiness, power, wisdom, justice, and beneficence." A practical atheist, meanwhile, is one "who endeavours to instil the same belief into others."[60] Beattie applied both terms to Hume.

Hume expressed surprise at the harsh tenor of Beattie's attack, but he was familiar with this kind of response to his philosophy. From the publication of the *Treatise* onward, Hume's critics accused him of authoring a "compleat system" of philosophy that served as a "public attack . . . on the great principles and duties of natural and revealed religion."[61] Bishop William Warburton (1698–1779), commenting on Hume's "Natural History of Religion," understood Hume's position quite perspicaciously, writing that Hume sought "to establish naturalism, a species of atheism, instead of religion."[62]

George Horne (1730–92), president of Magdalen College, Oxford, who in 1755 was rumored, wrongly, to have written the pamphlet urging the General Assembly of the Scottish Church to censure Hume, wrote, anonymously, *A Letter to Adam Smith* (1777), a popular writing republished

several times. Here, Horne publicly reprimanded Smith for calling "wise and virtuous" a man who, though he may have been good company and a skilled cardplayer, was "possessed with an incurable antipathy to all that is called religion; and who strained every nerve to explode, suppress, and extirpate the spirit of it among men, that its very name, if he could effect it, might no more be had in remembrance."[63] The *London Review* disapproved of "the sarcastical severity" with which Horne treated Hume so closely upon the philosopher's death, but critics such as Horne were right that Hume's philosophical corpus, when taken as a whole, constituted a comprehensive assault on superstition, and on the Christian religion, in particular.[64] What an early reviewer of the *Treatise* described as Hume's "oblique hints" and "artful insinuations" designed to weaken the Christian religion became, particularly in Hume's later works, a clear, powerful, and comprehensive critique of Christian theism.[65]

Christian theology is upheld by two pillars: (1) natural religion and (2) revealed religion. Natural religion, rooted in general revelation, has its origins in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero and was incorporated into Christian philosophy by the early Church Fathers. Natural theologians employ unaided human reason in order to comprehend the existence and the attributes of God. Revealed religion, on the other hand, is rooted in miraculous occurrences, that is, special revelation, specifically the reports of miraculous events contained in scripture. These alleged instances of divine activity support the claim that God is a personal being who is immanent in the world, actively sustaining it, and both listening to and responding to the prayers of the faithful. Hume targeted each of these pillars.[66]

Hume's systematic assault on Christian belief consists, first, in his arguments against natural theology, which are best expressed in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779); second, in his arguments against special revelation, which were removed from *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), but included, nine years later, in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748); and third, in his empirical study of the natural causes and consequences of religion—contained in the "Natural History of Religion" (1757)—in which Hume argued that religion is a man-made phenomenon, the result of humanity's ignorance of causes and fear of the unknown.[67] In these three works, Hume exposed the weaknesses of philosophical arguments for the Christian God's existence and the improbability of miraculous occurrences, while providing a naturalistic account of the origin of religion.

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST NATURAL RELIGION: HUME'S *DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION*

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* was likely written, in part or in its entirety, by 1751. After completing the *Dialogues*, Hume shared the manuscript with his closest friends, who advised him to postpone the publication of it, because of its assault on the rationality of religion and the potential harm it might inflict on his reputation, which had already been tarnished on account of the alleged impiety of his *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*. Accepting his friends' advice, Hume amended the manuscript periodically until 1776 and arranged for its publication upon his death. Although he first asked Adam Smith to secure its publication, it was not Smith but Hume's nephew who finally guided the *Dialogues* through the publication in 1779.

Hume based the *Dialogues* on Cicero's *De natura deorum*. Hume's three main characters, instead of repeating ancient Epicurean and Stoic perspectives on the gods, represent early modern and modern voices in natural theology. Demea, who articulates the cosmological argument for God's existence, represents the Christian rationalism practiced by such thinkers as Clarke and William Wollaston (1659–1752).[68] Demea blends rationalism and mysticism, quoting Plotinus and referring to the ancient Platonists as "the most religious and devout of all the pagan philosophers" (DNR 3.12, 58). The Cambridge Platonists, including Ralph Cudworth, Henry More (1614–87), and John Smith (1618–52), argued for the existence of God on the basis of both the understanding and inner experience, which is why Demea defends piety alongside rational demonstration as an important element of Christian apologetics. Cleanthes, meanwhile, presents the design argument for God's existence, and he serves as a spokesperson for another subset of Christian rationalists, those who combined experimental philosophy with Christian belief, arguing that the world, which is arranged as a machine, must have been designed by a supremely intelligent and powerful architect. The most prominent defenders of this design argument, according to which God's existence is inferred from the natural order evident in the universe, were Joseph Butler (1692–1752) and, later, William Paley (1743–1805).[69]

Philo, the skeptic, often seems to be Hume's mouthpiece in the *Dialogues*.[70] Nevertheless, no single character in the *Dialogues* consistently espouses Humean views, which are voiced sometimes by Philo, other times by Cleanthes, and sometimes even by Demea. It is preferable, then, to

approach the text of the *Dialogues* understanding that no single character represents Hume.[71]

Philo and Cleanthes do share what Pamphilus, the narrator of the *Dialogues*, calls "an accurate philosophical turn." Demea, on the other hand, adheres to what Pamphilus calls a "rigid inflexible orthodoxy" (DNR Preface.5, 30). Philo and Cleanthes, then, share Hume's own empirical methodology, which is grounded in experience and observation. And it is by means of the interplay between Philo and Cleanthes that the reader of the *Dialogues* learns the nature of Hume's mitigated skepticism. This is the philosophic method—espoused by Hume in the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*—that, as Philo attempts to show Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*, militates against natural and revealed religion.

Early in the *Dialogues*, the characters establish that the subject of debate is not the *being* of God, but the *attributes* of God. Strikingly, at the outset, Philo and Demea agree that reason cannot ascend high enough to ascertain the attributes of God. In fact, Demea describes as undue "temerity" the attempt to pry "into [the Deity's] nature and essence, decrees, and attributes," by reason alone, without the assistance of scripture (DNR 2.1, 43). Demea affirms that, although the being of God is "a truth so certain and self-evident," the nature of God, "his attributes" and "manner of existence . . . are mysterious to men" (DNR 2.1, 43). We cannot state positively, for example, by the exercise of natural reason, that God is spirit, but we can state, negatively, that God is not a body.[72] As a result, Philo and Demea form an unanticipated partnership, agreeing on the Humean point that the divine attributes are species of perfection "piously ascribe[d]" to the Deity (DNR 2.3–4, 44–45).[73] Philo happily emphasizes that "just reasoning and sound piety" arrive at the same conclusion here—that the nature of God is incomprehensible.

Lamenting, along with Demea, man's inability to reason his way to truth, Philo recommends the suspension of judgment on matters of natural religion. Because of the "obscure and uncertain" topic of the conversation, Philo assumes that the disputants can succeed only in manifesting "the eternal disputations of men, the obscurity of all philosophy, and the strange, ridiculous conclusions, which some of the greatest geniuses have derived from the principles of mere human reason" (DNR 1.2, 32). For this reason, Pamphilus had suggested in the opening of the *Dialogues* that discourse on such a sublime topic would succeed only in providing the reader with "agreeable amusement," not "decision" (DNR Preface.4, 30).

Cleanthes, though, presses Philo on this point. He recommends—as Hume did in the first *Enquiry* (EHU 10.4)—that the conversation partners act as wise men, apportioning their beliefs to the evidence (DNR 1.12, 38). Reflecting Hume's own remarks in the opening of the *Treatise* (T Intro.4), Cleanthes contends that, since it is impossible to suspend judgment, it is best to follow the evidence and assent to that which is probable in the fields of theology and natural religion, as is done "in all natural, mathematical, moral, and political science" (DNR 1.13, 39). Cleanthes declares that the kind of "total scepticism" that Philo is describing is incapable of being practiced in common life, because, given that human reason is surely imperfect, no one "may entirely renounce all belief and opinion" (DNR 1.6, 34). Because total skepticism is unlivable, Cleanthes asserts, "nothing could be more ridiculous than the principles of the ancient Pyrrhonians," those extreme skeptics who suspended judgment in order to cultivate a sense of tranquility (DNR 1.6, 35).

Philo then registers his agreement with Cleanthes, confirming that human beings lie under the necessity to assent to what is most probable. And what is most probable must serve as the grounds for decision and action. "To whatever length any one may push his speculative principles of scepticism," Philo remarks, "he must act, I own, and live, and converse like other men; and for this conduct he is not obliged to give any other reason than the absolute necessity he lies under of so doing" (DNR 1.9, 36). Admitting that he cannot affirm a theory rife with contradictions and absurdities, Philo adopts the recognizably Humean perspective of the mitigated skeptic, who trusts what nature shows him to be necessary for life and what experience, guided by proper method, reveals to him to be true.

In his philosophical writings, Hume adopted the perspective of the mitigated skeptic rather than the extreme skeptic. Unlike the ancient Pyrrhonians, he did not define skepticism as an inability to assent to one proposition over another.[74] Instead, he thought of Pyrrhonism in a modern way, as an extreme skepticism of our faculties of reason and sensation. Hume's confrontation with radical skepticism and his solution to it, in both the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*, hover in the background of the *Dialogues*. And Hume's treatment of the skeptical dilemma is crucial to understanding the "accurate" philosophical method to which Philo and Cleanthes adhere in their investigation of the nature of God.

In book 1, part 4 of the *Treatise*, Hume indulged in a kind of extreme skepticism that revealed the "manifold contradictions and imperfections

in human reason," the same imperfections that Philo bemoans in the *Dialogues*. In the justly famous conclusion of part 4, Hume wailed that these considerations "heated my brain," that these skeptical questions had "confounded" him, leaving him "in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty" (T 1.4.7.8). What were these skeptical considerations that had burdened Hume with "this philosophical melancholy and delirium" (T 1.4.7.9)?

When searching for rational justification for his beliefs—for example, that the sun will rise tomorrow, that he knows himself, that the world outside his mind exists—Hume confronted the tormenting reality that he was unable to find any reason to assent to these views, to justify his beliefs, because of the frailty of his faculties. He could not "defend his reason by reason" (T 1.4.1.2). Since he could reason his way into and out of any of these beliefs, he found himself groping for a foundation on which to base his assent.

Logic and mathematics were not exempt from these doubts. A rationalist might suppose that logic and mathematics offer a path to surety—since they consist of seemingly eternal relationships between pure ideas that are detached from experience—but Hume anxiously observed that "there is no algebraist nor mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it" (T 1.4.1.2). Even the mathematician, that is, must repeatedly check his work. But each time he checks his work, he adds a new observation, and thus a new probability that he might be wrong. The expert mathematician, then, finds certain knowledge elusive, since, by reworking his equation to ensure its correctness, his "knowledge resolves itself into probability, and becomes at last of the same nature with that evidence, which we employ in common life" (T 1.4.1.4).[75]

The evidence we employ in common life is based on sense experience. But our sense experience is too limited to provide us with a foundation for our beliefs. For example, we assume, in everyday life, that the objects we perceive have an independent, external existence. But we are only aware of objects—say, the trees in one's front yard—when we immediately sense them. Do they exist independently when out of our sight? We believe they do. But it is neither sense nor reason that leads us to believe in the independent existence of external objects, but the imagination, which fills in the gap between our interrupted perceptions (T 1.4.2.24).

What is it, moreover, that we encounter in our perceptions? According to Hume, "the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind, (that is, all of us, at one time or other)" think we have direct access to external objects (T 1.4.2.36). This is the approach of the ancient philosophers, who thought all qualities—colors, shapes, sounds—inhered in a *substance*. And the ancients explained changes in qualities or accidents by reference to *substantial form*, that which directs these changes, while organizing and maintaining the unity of the substance. Hume blasted these Aristotelian notions of *substance* and *substantial form* as "unreasonable and capricious" *fictions* (T 1.4.3.1).

Hume considered the modern Lockean philosophy correct, insofar as it held that we perceive *ideas* of objects, not the objects themselves. Locke, though, in accord with the theory of double existence, supposed that secondary qualities—such as color, sound, taste, and smell—exist only in our minds. That is why, Hume explained, what "seems bitter to one . . . is sweet to another" (T 1.4.4.3). Locke also supposed that the features of body—such as extension, motion, and solidity—are primary qualities that have real independent existence, existing outside the mind, unlike secondary qualities, which do not. But Hume, taking a lesson in extreme skepticism from Berkeley (EHU 12.15n32), argued that the same reasoning that leads us to believe that color, sound, and taste exist only in the mind leads us to believe that extension, too, exists only in the mind (T 1.4.4.6). Do we, then, have any reason to think the external world exists?

Having taken note of the falsehoods in ancient and modern philosophy, Hume turned inward. But he realized that he had no perception of "something simple and continu'd," which he could call "*himself*" (T 1.4.6.3). Instead, he discovered that his mind consists only of "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (T 1.4.6.4). The imagination fills in the gap between these successive perceptions, making it appear as if there is something stable and continued, called the self, which somehow contains these perceptions. Having rejected the idea of an immaterial soul—and supposed that the motion of matter, alone, might be responsible for thought (T 1.4.5)—Hume found himself isolated and despondent, having launched into the "immense depths of philosophy" only to be shipwrecked, left lying hopelessly on a barren rock, unable to give rational assent to belief in the existence of himself or the world around him.

In order to carry on his philosophical project—which he ultimately did, of course—Hume had to provide a solution to these skeptical doubts. Only then could he establish a "science of man," that is, a delineation of the principles of the mind. And he claimed to have based his science of man "on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security" (T Intro.6). But what was that foundation?

The "solid" foundation of Hume's "science of man" is "experience" (T Abs.2–3). It is the same foundation that informs Hume's writings on the mind, morals, politics, aesthetics, history, and economics. And it is the same foundation that informs Philo's and Cleanthes's investigation into natural theology in the *Dialogues*. No sound philosophy, according to Hume, "can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority" (T Intro.10).

The radical French skeptic Pierre Bayle arrived at a different conclusion. Bayle, before Hume, had encountered the contradictions, paradoxes, and perplexities into which philosophical reasoning is apt to lead us. Having come face-to-face with the futility of reason, though, Bayle clung to divine revelation as his authority, as his guide in future investigations. Hume, instead, placed his trust in the authority of "experience and observation" (T Intro.7).[76] Admitting that the mind of man is unwilling to rest "like those of beasts" within the narrow confines of everyday life, but is intent on searching out the springs and principles of nature and human nature, Hume asserted that we ought to choose the "safest and most agreeable" guide to lead us in these—potentially perilous—speculations. And Hume recommended "philosophy," rather than "superstition," as the most appropriate guide (T 1.4.7.13).

By opting for philosophy over religion, though, Hume did not leave faith behind. He countenanced another kind of faith, which he sneaked through the back door of his philosophy. Not faith in God, but "faith in our senses" (T 1.4.3.56).[77] Hume claimed that we "ought" to place faith in the senses, but he also thought human beings were inclined to do so automatically, as long as we do not become preoccupied with radical skeptical questioning.[78] As he expressed it in the first *Enquiry*, humans "repose faith in their senses," by means of "a natural instinct . . . without any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason" (EHU 12.7).

This natural instinct is what saved Hume from his "philosophical melancholy and delirium" in the conclusion of the *Treatise*. When we

philosophize in isolation, as Hume did in book 1, part 4 of the *Treatise*, reason may cause us to question the existence of objects or the self. But when we return to life, business, and company, we are quickly "perswaded there is both an external and internal world" (T 1.4.3.57). When, after intense philosophical reflection, Hume returned to common life—dining, conversing, playing a game of backgammon—he had no choice but to "yield to the current of nature" (T 1.4.7.9–10).

In the first *Enquiry*, Hume once again rehearsed skeptical doubts (section 4) and their solution (section 5).[79] And he declared that although extreme skepticism might cause "momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion," this Pyrrhonian doubt cannot "have any constant influence on the mind," because "nature is always too strong for principle" (EHU 12.15n32; 12.23). This is consistent with Hume's remark in the *Treatise* that "nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel" (T 1.4.1.7).

There are certain natural beliefs, then, that are underwritten by custom and habit, rather than reason, and that serve as the starting point for all subsequent empirical investigation.[80] According to Hume, experience and habit conspire "to operate upon the imagination, [and] make me form certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others, which are not attended with the same advantages" (T 1.4.7.3).[81] It is custom, or habit, for example, that leads us to think the future will reflect the past, so that when we encounter heat we can suppose the presence of flame (EHU 5.5). By custom, or habit, we trust in the uniformity of nature. And this trust makes possible all inferential reasoning (EHU 5.8). For this reason, Hume described custom as "the great guide of human life" (EHU 5.6).[82]

"Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason" (T 1.4.2.1).[83] But Hume continued to refer to himself as a "true" or "Academic" skeptic (T 1.4.7.14; EHU 12). The guiding passion of the Academic skeptic, as Hume acknowledged, is "love of truth" (EHU 5.1). In accord with the ancient Academic commitment to love of truth, Hume did not give up on reason, but oriented his own philosophy toward both "advancement of knowledge" and protection from error (T 1.4.7.14).

In order to promote sound judgment and intellectual integrity, Hume adhered to a Newtonian method (EPM 1.10). Hume, who praised Sir Isaac Newton for being "cautious in admitting no principles but such

as were founded on experiment" (HIST 6:542), can be described as Newtonian insofar as he pursued an adequate level of certainty in philosophical investigation, inducing general, universal, and uniform laws from experience and observation.[84] By following general rules (T 1.3.15) consistent with Newton's *regulae philosophandi*, Hume argued that sound reasoners could correct rash and faulty judgment.[85] For Hume, "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (EHU 12.25). In this case, the epistemic confidence we have about our judgments and beliefs is enhanced by the experimental method, which moves us beyond the initial faith we have in our senses into the realm of philosophical investigation. Hume hoped his emulation of Newton's caution and experimentalism would help him "to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination" (T 1.4.7.14).

Newton, however, incorporated God, the living, intelligent author of nature, into his experimental philosophy. And Newtonian philosophers, including perhaps most notably Samuel Clarke, reconciled the experimental philosophy with the religious hypothesis. In the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes describes himself as an experimental theist of this sort. But Hume never endorsed this reconciliation between experimental philosophy and theology. He adamantly opposed it. The *Dialogues* might be read appropriately, as Gianni Paginini has suggested, as Hume's attempt to turn "Newton's epistemology against his theology," since Hume used Newton's own principles to argue against his religious hypothesis.[86]

Hume's Academic skepticism relies on an empirical method rather than the dialectical method of the ancient Academics. The dialectical method enabled classical Socratic thinkers, such as Cicero, to venture into natural theology, to assent to the probability of an intelligent designer, an immaterial soul, and an afterlife. The first aspect of Hume's skepticism—holding one's views with "doubt, and caution, and modesty" (EHU 12.24–25)—is consistent with ancient Academic philosophy, as expressed in Cicero's *Academica*, for example, but the second aspect, which restricts high and distant inquiries, is an element of Pyrrhonian skepticism that Hume incorporated into his system.[87] This Pyrrhonian common-life limit served as an additional means by which Hume might disentangle religion from experimental philosophy. One might say, then, that Hume the empiricist re-

tained skepticism as an ever-present feature of his philosophy in order to cut off potential routes to natural theology.[88]

Hume's transition in the *Treatise* from extreme skepticism to a moderate skeptical empiricism built on natural belief is replayed, albeit briefly, early in the *Dialogues* in the conversation between Philo and Cleanthes. After listening to Philo's expression of doubt in the powers of human reason, Cleanthes remarks that extreme skepticism, which includes the suspension of belief, is impossible, because one cannot "entirely renounce all belief and opinion" (DNR 1.5, 34). Upon reentering society, a person is reminded of the necessity that impels her to act, reason, and believe, and at that moment "philosophical melancholy dissipates." In the narrative of the *Dialogues*, Philo voices philosophical melancholy, and Cleanthes voices the solution to these doubts. Philo accepts Cleanthes's solution. This is exemplary of the way in which Hume divides his voice in the *Dialogues*.

Although Pamphilus, in the preface, implies that the participants in the *Dialogues* will arrive at no decision, Cleanthes, in part 12, says it is "absolutely impossible to maintain or defend" "no system at all" (DNR 12.5, 118). And Philo agrees that the skeptic must think, believe, and reason (DNR 12.6, 118; 12.8n1, 121). At the conclusion of the *Dialogues*, it is dependent on the reader to decide which stance on the existence and nature of the Deity is most reasonable. But one cannot avoid making judgments on the matter. Although the very act of debating the nature and existence of the Deity seems to violate Hume's common-life limit, the characters in the *Dialogues*, who adhere to Hume's "accurate" philosophical method, have the debate while resorting to "experience" as their authority.

Throughout the *Dialogues*, Philo signals that he will not suspend judgment, but will, upon investigation, approve of a particular theory that best explains our experience of reality. Philo's "scrupulous method of proceeding" requires him to do so, to reason in accord with experience. Interestingly, Philo and Cleanthes share the same epistemology to which Hume's character "Epicurus" adhered in EHU 11.[89] Hume portrayed this "scrupulous" and "accurate" method as the best way to approach philosophical subjects. And he devoted the bulk of the *Dialogues* to an investigation of arguments for God's existence and attributes that depended on this method (DNR 1.9, 36; 2.4, 44–45). Hume dedicated only one part of the *Dialogues*—part 9—to Demea's philosophical rationalism, a method that was inaccurate, from a

Humean perspective, because it depended on demonstrative reason rather than experience to prove the existence of God.

Philo and Cleanthes, like Hume, deny the legitimacy of a priori reasoning when applied to matters of fact and existence. And that is why they spend so little time considering Demea's argument. According to "Hume's Fork," as it is known among contemporary philosophers, there are two kinds of reasoning: demonstrative reasoning, which consists of the relations of ideas in logic and mathematics, and probable reasoning, which concerns matters of fact and existence. According to Hume, matters of fact and existence can only be known probabilistically, because they can be encountered only through the experience of constant conjunction. One reason the *Treatise* was immediately interpreted as atheistic is that Hume denied that we can know by either reason or intuition any kind of causal power existing in objects themselves.[90] Causal inferences rest entirely on experience, that is, on our observation of objects constantly conjoined, and our habitual expectation that the future will resemble the past. But no one has experienced the creation of the world. And no one could possibly re-create the creation of the world in a lab. It does not mean much, then, to call God the first cause when one denies the reality of causal power inherent in nature and asserts that our knowledge of cause and effect comes only from the operation of the mind, which observes two things, or events, joined together repeatedly in experience. Consequently, by changing how we think about cause and effect, Hume in the *Treatise* "was effectively burning all bridges between the world and God," as Gianluca Mori puts it.[91]

Only when reasoning about quantity and number did Hume think demonstrative, syllogistic reasoning could be valid.[92] Demea's alleged proof of the existence of God, though, was designed to produce mathematical certainty regarding a matter of fact and existence. Hume modeled Demea's argument on Samuel Clarke's.[93] And Clarke's own efforts reflected those of the Cambridge Platonists, including Henry More, who claimed in his *Antidote against Atheisme* (1653) that "this truth of the existence of God . . . [is] as clearly demonstrable as any theorem in Mathematicks."[94] Clarke's argument—repeated by Demea—is based on the principle of sufficient reason, according to which everything that exists must have an adequate explanation for its existence, either in itself or something else. Since the universe came into existence, Demea argues, it must have a cause. And since nothing comes into existence by itself, we must look for "some ultimate cause, that is necessarily existent," that is, God (DNR 9.3, 90–91).

Cleanthes, echoing Hume's claims in the first *Enquiry* (EHU 4.2), responds:

> There is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or prove it by any arguments *a priori*. Nothing is demonstrable unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no Being, whose existence is demonstrable. I propose this argument as entirely decisive, and am willing to rest the whole controversy upon it. (DNR 9.5, 91)

Cudworth's *True Intellectual System*, in which he argued against a stock atheist espousing Lucretian and Hobbesian views, began with a principle on which Cudworth thought all could agree, namely, *ex nihilo nihil fit* ("out of nothing, nothing comes"). Everything that comes into existence has a cause. And there must be something necessary in itself, which does not owe its being to anything else. And we call that being, which is necessary in itself, God.[95] That which is the cause of all else and that possesses necessary existence must be spiritual and intelligent, since matter does not move itself, nor does it possess the capacity for thought. Since, as Cudworth professed, mind precedes matter, God, the first and necessary cause, must be responsible for the rational order of the universe and for bestowing on human beings the reason by which to discern that order.

Henry More theorized—as did his fellow Cambridge Platonists—that an individual can know God by means of the rational faculty, or the intellect. As long as one is not "craz'd," he possesses an idea of God, a being "absolutely and fully perfect." This idea of God is "natural and essential to the soul of man."[96] In this case, God need not be "experienced." For example, even if a person has never encountered a perfect, or ideal, triangle in the material world, that person can still envision a perfect triangle in the mind. And one knows what a triangle is by grasping its form. Similarly, a supreme omniscient and omnipotent being can be envisioned in the mind without having been seen, heard, or touched.[97] Thus, even though "God does not immediately fall under the knowledge of the senses," according to More, God can be known by the faculty of the intellect, which is not sense-based, but which abstracts from sensory knowledge in order to

grasp or recognize forms, the essences of things.[98] It is not only the efficacy of the demonstrative proof that is crucial to Demea's form of Neoplatonism, but also the possibility that one might possess an idea of God deduced from the experience of motion, causality, regularity, and order in nature. And this is a possibility that no one else in the *Dialogues* takes seriously.

Furthermore, Hume denied there could be any logical deduction from fact and experience to the existence of God. In the *Treatise*, Hume argued that "the principle of innate ideas" was "false," in which case "the supposition of a deity can serve us in no stead" when searching for causal power (T 1.3.4.10). Since, according to Hume, every idea is derived from an impression and we have no impression of God—nor for that matter, of any causal principle—we cannot have an idea of God or causal power.[99] We have no impression, moreover, of something infinite or something that is not contingent. So how could we have an idea of an infinite and necessary God? With these arguments, an early reviewer of the *Treatise* observed, "the argument *à Priori* for the Existence of God . . . [is] utterly demolished. This Writer has here destroy'd the Foundation of it, and so there's an End of the whole Fabrick."[100]

Philo clearly adheres to Hume's epistemology when he declares, "Our ideas reach no farther than experience. We have no experience of divine attributes and operations" (DNR 2.4, 44–45). Hume had maintained that when reasoning about matters of fact and existence—whether about morals, politics, natural philosophy, physics, or divinity—syllogistic reasoning can only produce "sophistry and illusion," unreliable theories detached from experience (EHU 12.21). Hume thereby regarded matters of fact and existence as impervious to any demonstrative, a priori proofs. For this reason, Hume viewed his experimental philosophy as superior to vulgar philosophy and superstition. Philo, too, claimed that if we were to reason prior to experience, then we would likely approve of "every chimera" of fancy, however contrary to matters of fact (DNR 2.12, 47). Philo abruptly derides Demea's allegedly "infallible demonstration" as utterly inadequate (DNR 9.1, 90). The a priori argument of Demea, in other words, is dismissed out of hand, one might say, a priori, based on Philo's Humean naturalism itself, which equates metaphysical argumentation, engaged in via intellection, with "loose reveries of the fancy" (T 1.4.2.51).[101]

The a priori argument exists on the margins of Hume's *Dialogues*. The interlocutors' main subject of concern is the a posteriori argument for God's existence, an argument that accords with experimental philosophy. Parts 2

through 8 of the *Dialogues* consist of Cleanthes's presentation of the argument and Philo's rebuttals. Whereas Demea's rational, demonstrative proof was supposed to produce certainty regarding God's existence, Cleanthes's experimental, a posteriori argument is, at best, probable. Demea charged Cleanthes with giving "the advantage to atheists" by reaching "no farther in this subject than experience and probability" (DNR 2.6, 45–46).

According to Cleanthes, human beings can plainly judge from experience that any artifact, such as a watch or a house, requires an architect who can be credited with the formation of the artifact. Cleanthes thereby claims that from our experience of universal order we can assert with a considerable degree of probability that a mind—exhibiting a degree of intelligence that, though analogous to human intelligence, is far superior to it—ordered the complex parts of the universe, enabling them to function as they do according to steady and predictable laws.

Philo challenges this claim, arguing on similar empirical grounds that the existence of a personal and providential God based on the probability of analogy is not very probable at all. Philo argues that Cleanthes's proposal, which constitutes "a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause," is dependent on "a very weak analogy, which is confessedly liable to error and uncertainty" (DNR 2.7, 46). Philo insists that Cleanthes has taken too "wide a step" in comparing the universe to a ship, a house, or a watch (DNR 2.18, 49). Philo, too, abides by the second rule of Newton's *regulae philosophandi* that *like effects prove like causes*. But a house does not even approach the complexity of an entire universe. A house and a universe are not like effects.

Citing Lucretius and Velleius (the Epicurean character in Cicero's *De natura deorum*), Philo asks how one could comprehend one supreme being ordering, controlling, and directing the events of so expansive a universe (DNR 5.1–2, 67–68). "The universal cause of all," Philo contends, must "be vastly different from mankind, or from any object of human experience and observation" (DNR 5.3, 68). Philo thereby recommends that we dismiss this imperfect analogy between human and divine intelligence. Whereas Cleanthes had asserted that "the universe could not originally attain its order and arrangement, without something similar to human art" (DNR 2.23, 51), Philo objects that, though Cleanthes's argument is drawn from experience, it is not confirmed by constant conjunction—our observation of one thing repeatedly following another—which, for Hume, is the only basis on which to make causal claims (T 1.4.5.30).

Indeed, the creation of the universe is "without parallel, or specific resemblance."[102] "Will any man tell me with serious countenance," Philo remarks, "that an orderly universe must arise from some thought and art, like the human; because we have experience of it?" (DNR 2.24, 51). Philo asserts that reason "is nothing but a species of experience" (DNR 2.25, 52). Thus, Philo demands of Cleanthes: "Cite your experience." "Have you ever seen nature in any such situation as resembles the first arrangement of the elements? Have worlds ever been formed under your eye?" (DNR 2.28, 53).

For all we know, Philo suggests, the builder of a ship might be a stupid mechanic, who failed repeatedly and only succeeded in his design by copying the productions of others. The same might apply to the builder of the universe: "Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out." Furthermore, many human beings, working in conjunction, are often required to build a house or ship. "Why may not several Deities combine in contriving and framing a world?" (DNR 5.7, 69). And if God is like human beings in the exercise of creative intelligence, then why not assume that God is like human beings in every other way also? Quoting Epicurus, who "maintained, that . . . the gods must have a human figure," Philo suggests that God might be entirely corporeal, with eyes, ears, a nose, and a mouth (DNR 5.11, 70). And if male and female pervade the universe, why not posit the existence of many male and female gods who procreate, which returns us to the theogony of the pagans (DNR 5.10, 70)? If causation depends on constant conjunction and no one experienced the creation of the world, then how would anyone know anything about the nature, or even existence, of a first cause, or be able to speak about it in human terms?

Demea quietly listens to Philo's remarks about the possibility that the "very faulty and imperfect" world was the "lame performance" of an "infant" or "superannuated" or otherwise "imperfect" deity who later rejected his "rude" production (DNR 5.12, 72). It is not until much later that Demea realizes that Philo is reaching the same conclusions as "the greatest libertines and infidels." And Cleanthes mocks Demea for coming to this realization so late in the conversation (DNR 11.18, 114–15).

Philo's treatment of the design argument echoes that of "Hume-Epicurus," as Gianluca Mori calls the character, in section 11 of the first *Enquiry*.[103] "Hume-Epicurus" argued that individuals who infer the existence of an intelligent designer from the phenomena of nature "become so en-

amoured of this offspring of your brain, that you imagine it impossible, but he must produce something greater and more perfect than the present scene of things, which is so full of ill and disorder." Theists forget about the faultiness of the created order. They ascribe to God attributes of excellence, such as benevolence and perfection, that are based on pious attachment rather than evidence. "Hume-Epicurus" concluded that, according to the empirical data, at least, "this superlative intelligence and benevolence"—of God—"are entirely imaginary, or, at least, without any foundation in reason" (EHU 11.15).[104] Philo, too, insists that divine attributes are credited to God out of the "utmost licence of fancy and hypothesis" (DNR 5.12, 71). Later, Philo admits that the dismissal of analogical argumentation would devastate the very enterprise of theology: "If we abandon all human analogy . . . we abandon all religion, and retain no conception of the great object of our adoration" (DNR 11.1, 105). Indeed, if Philo is right, then we cannot describe God in human terms or justify the belief that God is wise, that God is one, and that God is immaterial. All these pious names are merely projections of the fancy.

Whereas Cleanthes imagines God as an architect designing the universe according to a preordained plan, a set of ideas existing in the divine mind, Philo is satisfied with the assumption that the material world orders itself (DNR 4.10, 64). This position, after all, allows us "never to look beyond the present world" (DNR 4.9, 64). There is nothing to gain, according to Philo, by resorting to a universe of ideas to explain the existence of a universe of objects. In fact, Philo regularly objects to Cleanthes's unwarranted habit of giving "thought the precedence," as if mind must precede matter, or thought must precede motion (DNR 8.11, 88). Philo treats them as coeval. By doing so, Philo thinks he avoids an indefinite search for causes. He contends that if a material world requires a cause, then so does a mental world (DNR 4.7, 62). And this will inaugurate an indefinite search for causes. He accuses Cleanthes of stopping this search arbitrarily at the Deity (DNR 7.14, 81). And Cleanthes, because he denies Demea's claim that God is a necessary being, has no rebuttal to this accusation. Instead, he must admit that his stopping point is arbitrary: "I have found a Deity; and here I stop my enquiry" (DNR 4.13, 65).

For Philo, it is "wise," indeed far more economical, "to limit all our enquiries to the present [that is, material] world, without looking farther" (DNR 4.11, 64). As the *Dialogues* progress, he speaks with "alacrity and

triumph" (DNR 5.5, 68). He responds to the religious hypothesis with a series of nonreligious hypotheses. And he claims that every explanation that does not imply a logical contradiction is equally likely. Still, although Philo initially says that theories of skepticism, polytheism, and theism are on "like footing," so that the existence of 30,000 deities—on Hesiod's account—and one Supreme Deity—on Cleanthes's account—are equally likely hypotheses (DNR 6.13, 77), he eventually describes nontheistic accounts of universal order as more plausible than theistic accounts.

All of Philo's hypotheses from parts 5 through 8 constitute challenges—victorious challenges, in Philo's mind—to Cleanthes's inference that there is an intelligent author of nature. Philo proposes in part 6, for example, that the universe is less like a machine than an animal body, which is organized by a world soul, an internal principle of life and motion. This version of Spinozism, or pantheism, according to which the world is God's body, is an ancient theory more justified (DNR 6.4, 73), Philo thinks, than the "lame and defective" modern machine analogy (DNR 7.1, 78) that conceives of the universe as the product of something like human artifice. If the universe is more like an animal or vegetable, then it must have been created by generation or procreation, as a tree or animal spreads its seeds, as Philo proposes in part 7. Philo continually challenges the principle of mind before matter, which was so central to antiatheist literature and exemplified by the writing of Cudworth and Clarke. Philo asserts: "Reason, in innumerable instances, is observed to arise from the principle of generation, and never to arise from any other principle" (DNR 7.15, 82). A slumping Cleanthes admits he cannot resolve the difficulties Philo brings to his attention (DNR 7.18, 83).

In part 8 of the *Dialogues*, Demea asks Philo how "matter can acquire motion, without any voluntary agent, or first mover." Philo glibly retorts, "Where is the difficulty . . . of that supposition?" (DNR 8.2–4, 85). Philo, echoing Hume in the *Treatise* (T 1.4.5), declares that the "beginning of motion in matter itself is as conceivable *a priori* as its communication from mind and intelligence" (DNR 8.4, 85). One might suppose, then, that motion has "been propagated by impulse through all eternity." In accord with this supposition, Philo, who had just proposed two rival cosmogonies, now presents a third, a revised version of the Epicurean-materialist explanation for the natural order of the universe (DNR 8.2, 84).[105]

Philo refers to the updated Epicurean "hypothesis of cosmogony" as "not absolutely absurd and improbable," in large part because it does not rely

on an unseen mental world, but on a theory of self-constituting matter to explain the present state of the universe (DNR 8.6, 85). Philo argues that, as far as human experience is concerned, "the fact is certain, that matter is, and always has been in continual agitation" (DNR 8.5, 85). Based on this certainty, one might argue that the order we ascertain in the world, meaning the "adjustment of means to ends and a tendency to self-preservation," was generated by the perpetual movement of matter, "through many successions of changes and revolutions." Chaos and disorder may have prevailed for many ages until finally the universe rested in its present state, by means not of "wisdom and contrivance," but of "the eternal revolutions of unguided matter." Philo concludes that this neo-Epicurean hypothesis offers a "plausible" if not "true" solution to the problems posed by Cleanthes's design argument (DNR 8.7–8, 86–87). Philo even asks, "Can we ever reasonably expect greater success in any attempts of this nature?" (DNR 8.11, 88).

At this point, a boastful Philo exclaims that "all religious systems," which are beset with "great and insuperable difficulties," pit one theist against another (DNR 8.12, 88). Indeed, Cleanthes and Demea had exchanged barbs with one another, peppering their discourse with harsh invective (DNR 4.1–4, 61–62). While the theists were combating one another, charging each other with "atheism," they, according to Philo, "prepare[d] a complete triumph for the sceptic; who tells them, that no system ought ever to be embraced with regard to such subjects." Although Philo claims that a "total suspense of judgment" is the only reasonable response to the contest between religious systems, he had already run through a set of nonreligious hypotheses, most recently the revised Epicurean hypothesis, that, based on empirical data, he declared to be plausible. The religious hypothesis, meanwhile, is according to Philo, "supported by no appearance of probability" at all (DNR 11.5, 107). Gianni Paganini is right to observe that although Philo recommends the suspension of judgment, his asseverations throughout the *Dialogues* become more "positive and declarative," even forming what might be called a "constructive atheistic project." "Hume-Epicurus" presented the Epicurean hypothesis in EHU section 11 as a *challenger* to the religious hypothesis. Philo points to the revised Epicurean hypothesis in DNR part 8 as more *probable* than the religious hypothesis.[106]

Even after Demea's demonstrative argument had been brusquely cast aside by Cleanthes, Philo keeps Demea engaged in the debate by baiting him into agreement with him on the world's many evils, including perpetual

war, anxiety, hunger, want, weakness, and disasters (DNR 10.8, 96). Philo observes that the earth is littered with hospitals, prisons, and battlefields inhabited by the sick, the demented, and the dying. Wherever one looks there is "tyranny, famine, pestilence" (DNR 10.15, 98). Demea credits the prevalence of evil in the world to human sinfulness. Philo, meanwhile, runs through these evils in order to restate Epicurus's argument from evil.[107]

Philo lures Demea into accepting the premise that misery significantly outweighs happiness on earth. If this is true, then how can someone conclude that a just, benevolent, merciful God, who is all-powerful, made this world for human happiness? If God's power is infinite and his will is always executed, but "neither man nor any other animal are happy," then, Philo concludes, "the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity." Philo continues: "Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (DNR 10.25, 100).

If God were indeed powerful and benevolent, Philo remarks, then he could "exterminate all ill, wherever it were to be found; and produce all good" (DNR 11.7, 108). God, for example, could have "given to Caligula's brain in his infancy" some change in temperament that would have "converted him into a Trajan" (DNR 11.8, 109). So why, Philo inquires, did not the Deity give human beings just one more *simple* advantage to help them ward off evils, such as ensuring that all human beings exhibited industry rather than idleness? If only the Deity would have taken precautions like these, then paradise could have been attained on earth and misery abolished. "Here," Philo concludes, "our demands may be allowed very humble" (DNR 11.10, 111). Philo, then, registers his agreement with Lucretius, who had insisted, "In no way was the universe made by the power of God / For *our* sake, when the universe stands so profoundly flawed."[108]

Earlier in the dialogue, Philo had denied that we can know for certain that God exists or that he possesses moral attributes. There are, however, two things Philo does regard as certain: that matter is and always has been in continual agitation (DNR 8.5, 85) and that the world is not providentially governed for the sake of human happiness (DNR 10.33–34, 102–3). The prevalence of pain, agony, and death in life is affirmed by "every one's feeling and experience." And this, according to Philo, is "an authority so established as nothing can subvert. No decisive proofs can ever be pro-

duced against this authority." By means of the Epicurean argument from evil, he declares his final "triumph" over Cleanthes and Demea, the defenders of natural theology (DNR 10.36, 103).[109] He regards the argument as clear and decisive. And he even asserts that "there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these" (DNR 10.24, 100). Because we can be certain, based on the authority of experience, that no principle of mind is needed to explain the movement of matter and that evil predominates over good, Philo triumphantly assents to the greater probability of nonreligious explanations for the order we perceive in the universe.

Philo, however, engages in an abrupt turnaround in the concluding section of the *Dialogues*. In what has been called "Philo's reversal," Philo pays lip service to the theistic arguments that he had declared to be implausible during the course of the debate, and he claims to accept that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" (DNR 12.33, 129). Philo's reversal in the concluding section of the *Dialogues* is indeed puzzling. Philo, who had doggedly attacked every argument in favor of Christian theism, ultimately admits that there is such thing as "true religion," which is "a species of philosophy." This "true religion," moreover, lacks the "pernicious consequences" that so often accompany religion as it appears in the world (DNR 12.22, 125–26), namely, the credulity of the masses, the hypocrisy of the priests, and social disorder. Hume did portray superstition and enthusiasm, the chief characteristics of popular religion, as "the corruptions of true religion" (E-SE 73). But Hume, reputed for his attentiveness to history, never gave any historical examples of "true religion." And he categorized all forms of popular Christianity, from Roman Catholicism to Reformed Presbyterianism, as false.

Spinoza, too, wrote of "true religion" in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670). But this "true religion" was reducible to sound philosophy.[110] And the same applies to Humean true religion, which is equivalent to his true skepticism, which fosters the development of sound beliefs conducive to ethical formation. Hume clearly reviled popular religion, including the Presbyterianism in which he was raised, and denigrated Christian doctrine, including belief in a worship-worthy God possessing moral attributes. And in the *Dialogues*, Hume, through Philo, impressed upon readers the improbability that the first cause is a morally perfect, providential being. "If you can make out the present point, and prove mankind

to be unhappy or corrupted," Cleanthes tells Philo, then "there is an end at once of all religion. For to what purpose establish the natural attributes of the Deity, while the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?" (DNR 10.28, 101). Here, Cleanthes recognizes what the antiatheist writers Cudworth and Bentley had recognized in the seventeenth century, namely, that if you disprove providence, you render moot any philosophical inference or demonstration of God's existence and strike at the heart of Christian theism.

At the outset of the *Dialogues*, Philo had argued that the subject of debate is not "the *being*, but only the *nature* of the Deity" (DNR 2.3, 44). If Philo's acknowledgment of a "true religion" is taken seriously, then it seems as if the most Hume is willing to concede in the realm of religion is that there exists a first cause of the universe, based on the feeling human beings possess regarding the apparent order of the universe.[111] But the nature of this cause is unknowable, because the only analogy between the principle of order in the universe and human, or animal, nature is "remote" and "inconceivable" (DNR 12.7, 120).[112] And, furthermore, we are incapable of making any moral assessment of this first cause, who remains distant, impersonal, and unknowable. In this case, the first cause is not the source of morals. And human beings have no moral duties to exercise in relation to it. And if "true religion" is that which promotes good morals, then "true religion" has nothing to do with belief in a first cause. It is nothing other than sound philosophy.

Early readers of the *Dialogues* interpreted Philo's concession in part 12 that "all the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent Author" as insincere.[113] Philo spent most of the *Dialogues* assaulting the design argument. It is doubtful, then, that following his ruthless offensive he seriously believed that philosophical skepticism was, as he said, "the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian." Hume critic John Ogilvie resolved Philo's contradictory beliefs by attributing to him faith in "a blind nature," which, according to Philo's account, was preferable to Christian theism, or, in other words, faith in an "Omnipotent Tyrant."[114] Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), writing in 1780, concluded that "though the debate seemingly closes in favour of the theist, the victory is clearly on the side of the atheist."[115]

Hume may have included Philo's reversal in the conclusion of the *Dialogues* as an attempt to shield himself from controversy. This would have

been strange, though, since Hume's *Dialogues* were published posthumously. Hume would have had no reason by then to worry about receiving harsh blowback from the orthodox Popular Party of the Scottish Church. The Moderate Party, moreover, had gained ascendency over the Popular Party in 1763–64 with the election of William Robertson as moderator of the Church of Scotland.[116] Despite the waning influence of the Popular Party, though, Hume's friends, Gilbert Elliot and Hugh Blair, for example, encouraged him not to publish the *Dialogues* during his lifetime. The General Assembly of the Scottish Church, it seems, still would have taken an interest in the atheistic tone of the *Dialogues*, which would have put pressure on the Moderate ministers to distance themselves from their friend Hume. Perhaps, then, Hume inserted Philo's reversal to spare his friends the controversy that would have arisen from the *Dialogues*' publication, even after Hume's death. And perhaps he was making a broader overture to his Moderate friends by including Pamphilus's declaration that Cleanthes's approach was "still nearer to truth" (DNR 12.34, 130) and by writing to his friend Gilbert Elliot that Cleanthes was the "hero" of the dialogue. After all, Cleanthes clearly represented the epistemology of the Moderate *literati* of Edinburgh, which consisted of a genteel blend of Newtonian philosophy and Christian doctrine (L 1:153).

Richard Dees emphasizes friendship in his reading of Philo's reversal, arguing that even though Philo's critiques of the design arguments in parts 2 through 8 of the *Dialogues* are valid, he does not reiterate them in part 12 because he did not want to offend Cleanthes. In order to maintain their friendship, then, Philo emphasizes the similarities rather than the differences of their respective viewpoints. "In this way," Dees avers, "Philo enacts a belief for which he argues in part twelve itself: *the belief that morality is more important than metaphysics*."[117]

Philo's claim, though, that the fine workmanship evident in the universe attests to an intelligent designer is a clear mark of insincerity.[118] Previously, Philo had recounted the imperfections of nature, the "excess" and "defect," the "disorder" and "confusion," each of which tends toward human "ruin and misery." Throughout the *Dialogues*, Philo testifies to "the inaccurate workmanship of all the springs and principles of"—what Cleanthes calls—"the great machine of nature" (DNR 11.11, 111–12). Judging from these flaws, Philo regards God as either a bad architect or a creator who is hostile to his creation. Humans, though, lack any sense im-

pression of the first cause. And since reasoning by analogy is faulty, it is mistaken to think of any ordering principle in nature as an architect possessing moral characteristics. It is "far more probable" from Philo's perspective that the principle of order in the universe is "blind" nature that is "indifferent" to humans (DNR 11.14, 114). Philo declares, "The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children" (DNR 11.13, 113).

Demea leaves the conversation after Philo's lengthy argument from evil (DNR 11.21, 115). And this may be the real lesson concerning friendship in the *Dialogues*: that Demea, as Dees suggests, is the "real enemy."[119] From the outset of the *Dialogues*, Demea was an outlier. He was a rationalist and a mystic; a superstitious, credulous, and speculative reasoner. He reflected what Hume, in one of his essays, condemned as the "visionary systems or ravings of Plato" (E-PA 463n278). As a result, he is cast out of polite public discourse, which makes room only for those who operate on the basis of Hume's skeptical empiricism, that "accurate" philosophical turn that Cleanthes and Philo share. The orthodox Demea would have fit in with the Cambridge Platonists, whose confutations of Epicurean principles portrayed Plato as a heroic defender of the principles of theism. But Demea does not fit within the Humean vision of polite society.[120] In a letter to one of his critics, Hume, who presented himself as a moderate skeptic, expressed a desire to rise above rancor and "revive the happy times" when Epicureans, Stoics, and Academics could debate one another and maintain their friendship. It should come as no surprise that Hume left the Platonists off this list (L 1:173).

The *Dialogues* end with Philo claiming that the Christian theist, who believes in the benevolence and providence of God, must bemoan the ineptitude of natural theology and suffer "a longing desire and expectation" for "some more particular revelation to mankind" if he is going to support his belief in a benevolent deity (DNR 12.33, 129–30). In the *Dialogues*, Hume forcefully argues that natural theology is incapable of supporting the Christian belief in an intelligent, all-powerful, and benevolent author of the universe. Without the assistance of natural religion, the only reliable ground for Christian belief is special revelation, that is, the miraculous activity of God on earth, the possibility of which Hume treated in the first *Enquiry*.

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST REVEALED RELIGION: HUME'S *ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING*

Reading the *Dialogues* in isolation, one might interpret Hume as a fideist, someone who acknowledges the limitations of human reason and advocates reliance on Christian doctrine by faith alone. This interpretation seems unlikely, though, when the *Dialogues* are read in conjunction with the first *Enquiry*, in which Hume judged the intervention of divine agents in human affairs to be implausible, if not impossible. By exposing the manifest falsehood of revealed religion in "Of Miracles," section 10 of the first *Enquiry*, Hume, who had portrayed natural religion as sophistical, removed all possible theoretical support for the veracity of the Christian religion.

British writers regularly authored polemics against Catholic "superstition," against the doctrine of transubstantiation and contemporary reports of miracles, for example.[121] In "Of Miracles," Hume adopted a similar stance.[122] Hume asserted that he would make use of the anti-Catholic arguments of John Tillotson (1630–94), the former archbishop of Canterbury, as a model for his own critique, except he would take Tillotson's arguments further, applying them not only to the doctrine of transubstantiation but also to all reports of miracles ancient and modern.[123]

Hume defined miracles as violations of the laws of nature by the volition of a deity or the interposition of an invisible agent. Hume acknowledged that eyewitness accounts of the miracles of Christ form the foundation of Christian belief and practice. And Hume regarded Christianity's grounding in miraculous events as troubling, given the unreliability of eyewitness testimony.

Hume argued that there is no necessary connection between testimony and reality. The only reason we tend to believe the reports of eyewitnesses in daily affairs is that people generally do not have an obvious incentive to lie. Indeed, they would rather not risk the shame—and loss of reputation—that accompanies the telling of tall tales. Nevertheless, there is no *inviolable* connection between testimony and reality. Thus, we must assess whether or not it is probable that a witness to a miracle is telling the truth, that is, matching his testimony to real events. Hume recommended that, in response to reports of wonders, people weigh the evidence on both sides, before believing that divine powers intrude upon worldly affairs. This accords with the approach of the "wise man" who "proportions his

belief to the evidence" (EHU 10.4). For Hume, this is an essential principle of sound reasoning.

In both the *Treatise* (1.3.11.2) and the first *Enquiry* (6), Hume distinguished between demonstrations, probabilities, and proofs. Demonstrations, "arising from the comparison of ideas," produce knowledge (e.g., we can be certain that 2 + 2 = 4). Probabilities consist of evidence on both sides, causing us to assent to the side with greater evidence, but only with "doubt and uncertainty." But there is a "superior kind of evidence" that would be ridiculous to doubt. For example, only a madman would doubt that "the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye" (T 1.3.11.2). These, then, are proofs, "*such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition*" (EHU 6n10).

Hume's experimentalism, which aimed to unveil the powers and faculties of the mind (EHU 1.2, 1.13, 1.14), is grounded in proofs. The principle of the association of ideas, which explains the connections between thoughts in the mind (EHU 3), is one such proof on which Hume built. A proof is a species of probability that enables him to infer general, necessary, and exceptionless principles from uniform experience.[124] The notion of proof arose in the *Dialogues* when Philo declared the prevalence of misery over happiness in the world was confirmed by everyone's experience, an authority that no one could doubt. And the notion of proof arises again in "Of Miracles."

Whereas it is only probable that an eyewitness is telling the truth, so that the listener must weigh the evidence to determine whether to believe the eyewitness, we have "direct and full *proof*" that the laws of nature are universal and exceptionless: "Uniform experience amounts to a proof." And our "firm and unalterable experience" establishes the laws of nature. The "common course of nature" informs us that men must die and that fire consumes wood (EHU 10.12). Since miracles are defined as violations of these laws of nature and since belief in eyewitness testimony can only amount to a probability, not a proof, miracle reports do not—and can never—warrant our assent.

There is no balance (or counterpoise) between two equally weighty proofs in this case. No miracle report, which can be doubted, can exceed the proof produced by uniform experience, which cannot be doubted. Since uniform experience is the standard of truth, any single report of the violation of uniform experience must face rejection, for it is outweighed in every instance.[125]

But Hume went further, arguing not only that the probability of a miracle report can never outweigh the proof of a law of nature, but also that those who testify to miraculous occurrences are rarely trustworthy. They may be either deluded or deceptive. Either of these alternatives, according to Hume, is more probable than a violation of the laws of nature.

By raising the possibility that an eyewitness to an alleged miracle might simply be ignorant of the laws of nature, Hume cast doubt on the veracity of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, which were composed by "ignorant and barbarous ancestors" (EHU 10.20). Although British writers, such as Edward Stillingfleet (1635–99), had endeavored to defend the reliability of scripture's depictions of the supernatural, Hume applied his method not only to modern accounts of miracles but also to the Pentateuch, asserting that these books, like any other, were written by "a mere human writer and historian."[126] This human writer is, like any other, equally subject to knavery, ignorance, and delusion. Furthermore, this writer, who lived in a barbarous age, included no concurring testimony in support of his reports, which ought to cast doubt on his claims.

Hume also dismissed the idea that Christians are justified in believing the testimony of the apostles that Jesus rose from the dead.[127] From Hume's perspective, no human being's word is more reliable than the laws of nature, particularly when human nature is inherently susceptible to flights of religious enthusiasm. For this reason, Hume signaled that he was as likely to believe that Jesus rose from the dead as he was to believe that Queen Elizabeth died and rose again to regain her throne (EHU 10.37). And Hume gave no credence to the widespread defense of apostolic integrity, based on the claim that the apostles would not die for a lie. "A religionist," Hume insisted, "may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality: He may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause" (EHU 10.17).

Having shown, with reference to the laws of nature and human nature, the improbability that miracles can ever occur, Hume concluded, with an air of exasperation, that any person who is "moved by *Faith*" to assent to these reports is a *living* miracle, because he believes "what is most contrary to custom and experience" (EHU 10.41). Yet this *living* miracle, too, is easily demystified by the usual course of things. The religious believer is, like every other person, inclined to have his sound judgment subverted by alleged marvels and wonders, and, while under the influence of

fear and amazement, to place himself "under slavery to the grossest superstition" (E-Su 578). Hume, who conflated laypeople with the vulgar, ignorant, and uninstructed masses, referred to them all, in a phrase drawn from Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, as the *avidum genus auricularum*, that is, the kind of people eager for gossip (EHU 10.30).

Hume contended that in all cases the stable and reliable testimony of uniform experience outweighs eyewitness testimony. The irrefutable testimony of nature, according to Hume, reveals "the absolute impossibility" of miracles, whether ancient or modern (EHU 10.27). "Upon the whole," Hume maintained, "it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof." Since all popular religion, including Christianity, is based on the miraculous, Hume's conclusion—that no miracle report is probable enough to garner assent—is one that "with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation" (EHU 10.35). Any religion, such as Christianity, which is founded upon a miracle, must subsequently be deemed false.[128] Having wrecked the intellectual foundations of natural religion in the *Dialogues* and revealed religion in the first *Enquiry*, Hume developed a conjectural history, in the "Natural History of Religion," to explore the psychological origins of religious belief.

## A SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF: HUME'S "NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION"

Having manifested the lack of epistemic merit for theistic beliefs in the *Treatise*, the first *Enquiry*, and the *Dialogues*, Hume asked in the "Natural History of Religion" how human beings began believing in divine powers in the first place. The advancement of Hume's argument in these texts occurs logically, not chronologically. Hume likely wrote "Of Miracles" first, since it seems he intended to include it in the *Treatise.* Hume probably penned a fragment on the problem of evil, which later appeared in the *Dialogues*, at the same time. And he may have intended it to serve as a companion piece to "Of Miracles." Perhaps both were cut from the *Treatise* out of an abundance of caution. Hume completed a draft of the *Dialogues* in the 1750s, but he did not want it published until after his death. The "Natural History," meanwhile, was published as part of *Four Dissertations*

in 1757. Regardless of when Hume's writings on religion were composed or published, the demolition of natural religion in the *Dialogues* and revealed religion in the first *Enquiry* (both of which are built on principles established in the *Treatise*) logically precede the scientific account of religion's origins in the "Natural History."[129]

In the "Natural History of Religion," Hume explored the natural causes and consequences of religion, explaining why religion has been a perpetual presence—and prominent force—in human life, in spite of the seeming incoherence and impossibility of so many of its claims. According to Hume, arguments proffered on behalf of religious belief are specious, and the causes of religion are entirely mundane and predictable. People believe in the existence of invisible powers, because they are subject to universal human passions, such as hope, fear, and anxiety, and not because they are persuaded by rational argumentation.

Hume endorsed the design argument for God's existence early in the "Natural History" in order to stave off any suspicion that he was advocating a form of atheism. "The whole frame of nature," Hume declared, "bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion" (NHR Intro., 134). This profession of faith mirrors Philo's in the concluding section of the *Dialogues*.[130] In both cases, however, Hume's philosophical arguments belie his rhetorical endorsements of rational theism. The reader, then, must choose whether to interpret his philosophical arguments in light of his professions of faith or to interpret his professions of faith in light of his philosophical arguments.

Hume laid the groundwork for the "Natural History" by making two prefatory assertions. First, religion is a *nearly* universal phenomenon. It is not quite universal, since there are instances in which the occurrence of religion may be perverted or prevented altogether. Indeed, "Some nations have been discovered, who entertained no sentiments of Religion" (NHR Intro., 134). Second, religious belief varies considerably, depending on time, location, and culture. The only religious belief that garners unanimous agreement is the belief that there is an "invisible, intelligent power in the world" (NHR 4.1, 144). There is reason to conclude, then, that this one belief, to the extent that it is lively, vivacious, and unanimous, might be, for Hume, the only aspect of religious doctrine that has epistemic merit. Nevertheless, this belief, which is merely speculative and has no affect on

the decisions and actions of common life, does not seem to be necessary for life; nor does it seem essential to philosophical explanation. Aside from this core belief, "no two nations, and scarce any two men, have ever agreed precisely in the same [religious] sentiments" (NHR Intro., 134). Every other religious doctrine, then, is subject to debate. Since religious doctrine is neither universal nor uniform, religion becomes, in Hume's system, a secondary principle that arises from even more fundamental features of human nature, such as "self-love" (NHR Intro., 134). Indeed, it is in original passions such as self-love that Hume locates religion's provenance.

In their "ignorant and barbarous" state, Hume argued that "polytheism or idolatry was, and necessarily must have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind" (NHR 1.1, 135). Hume's evidence for this assertion is "the clear testimony of history," including the practices of "savage tribes" in America, Africa, and Asia (NHR 1.4, 135). In order to discover "the origin of religion," Hume suggested that we "turn our thoughts towards polytheism, the primitive religion of uninstructed mankind" (NHR 2.1, 138). Although Hume remarked that anybody who contemplates the works of nature "could never possibly entertain any conception but of one single being" as its designer, Hume concluded that, though it might sound absurd, it is neither impossible nor antithetical to reason and experience to assume that one design was produced by several authors. Hume offers an ancient example: "The statue of Laocoön, as we learn from Pliny, was the work of three artists: But it is certain, that, were we not told so, we should never have imagined, that a group of figures, cut from one stone, and united in one plan, was not the work and contrivance of one statuary" (NHR 2.2, 138). By leaving the reader with this example, Hume implied that the design argument for God's existence is as supportive of polytheism as it is of monotheism. We are not, according to Hume, under any necessity of believing that the world was created by one god rather than many.

In the beginning, humanity's primitive ignorance led people to look beyond the material world, into the invisible realm, in order to assign invisible causes for every natural phenomenon. Subsequently, through an exercise in imagination, they credited every natural event to some divinity with power over that domain. And these gods were given human traits and passions (NHR 3.2, 142). Hume noted that, by Hesiod's count, there were 30,000 deities in ancient Greece, including a "God of Sneezing" (NHR 2.4 Note A, 186). Prayers and sacrifices were offered to these gods

to ensure the success of future endeavors. Seamen, for example, would pray to Neptune before their voyage, hoping to bribe the god and attain his favor. If only—Hume surmised—these primitives "could . . . anatomize nature, according to the most probable, at least the most intelligible philosophy," they would have understood that nature constitutes itself by the constant movement of its own minute parts. There is no need to resort to a separate mental world to explain earthly phenomena (NHR 3.1, 141).

Thus, man's first impetus to religious piety was "not speculative curiosity, surely, or the pure love of truth" (NHR 2.5, 140). Instead, human beings "must be actuated by some passion, which prompts their thought and reflection." And according to Hume, religious thought is the result of "the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness; the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries" (NHR 2.5, 140).[131] Religion is not an original passion. It is not a response to the innate love of truth. It is a response to fear combined with the "natural frailty" of reasoning by analogy, of defining natural objects and events in human terms, of finding "human faces in the moon [and] armies in the clouds" (NHR 3.2, 141). Polytheists and idolaters sought to appease these human-like divinities to secure more certain and prosperous futures: "And it was pretty late too before these bethought themselves of having recourse to a mind of supreme intelligence, as the first cause of all" (NHR 4.10, 148).

According to Hume, there was no point at which monotheistic arguments came to be regarded as superior to polytheistic arguments. Instead, human beings, reasoning by analogy, supposed that, just as human societies tended to have one dominant ruler, such as a tribal chieftain or a king, there is likely one dominant deity that is superior to all the rest. Indeed, humans could not long admit that their gods were limited, capricious, or cruel; nor could they long admit that their god was one among many. Monotheism arose because of the human propensity to elevate their respective deities "to the utmost bounds of perfection" (NHR 8.2, 159). Jupiter, for example, was regarded by Homer and Hesiod as the reigning deity and was portrayed as the father of all gods and men. Yet, Hume pointed out that, according to the lineages of pagan gods in ancient Greece, Jupiter had ancestors, aunts, and uncles. Hume contended that the creators of pagan fictions, desiring to make one god supreme, elevated Jupiter as the preeminent deity, but in so doing, turned him into nothing

more than "an upstart parricide and usurper" (NHR 6.11, 156). Bayle had used almost identical language in his *Dictionary Historical and Critical* (1697–1702), when he asked, in the voice of Epicurus, "Is it consonant to the light of reason, to believe that Jupiter has an absolute power over the universe; he who is son of Saturn, and grandson to heaven? Is it for an Upstart-Deity, as he was, to govern Matter, which is an eternal and independent Being?"[132]

Hume applied the same principle to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, arguing that this God, worshipped by Jews and Christians, was a tribal deity who was subsequently characterized by his followers as the ruling divinity and the creator of the entire world. In the published manuscript of the "Natural History," Hume directly compared the ascent of Jupiter in ancient Greece to the ascent of God in ancient Israel (NHR 6.8, 156). In an early version of the "Natural History"—which he later amended—Hume made the connection with added clarity: "Thus the deity, whom the vulgar Jews conceived only as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, became their Jehovah and Creator of the world."[133]

Hume supposed that widespread adherence to the basic tenets of rational theism in eighteenth-century Great Britain was not the result of the overwhelming force of "invincible reasons." Instead, widespread adherence to the prevailing theology was the result of the "ignorance and stupidity of the people, and their incurable prejudices in favour of their particular superstitions" (NHR 6.1, 153). Hume described philosophical attachment to these childish superstitions as "blind and bigoted" (NHR 12.8, 169). Rational theists prop up these superstitions by skillfully developing entire philosophical systems on the idea that there is an intelligent author of the universe—who is also perfect, infinite, and benevolent—even though experience shows the world to be "the most *opposite* to the plan of a wise superintendent" (NHR 6.3, 154). Hume regarded such systems as expressions of prejudices instilled by education rather than accurate statements about the nature of the universe made in accord with experience and observation. Concluding that popular religious belief, particularly Christian belief, has no epistemic merit, Hume thundered: "Survey most nations and most ages. Examine the religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are any thing but sick men's dreams: Or perhaps will regard them more as the playsome whimsies of monkies in human shape, than the se-

rious, positive, dogmatical asseverations of a being, who dignifies himself with the name of rational" (NHR 15.6, 184).[134]

In his writings on religion, Hume depicted the religious believer as someone who is, in the apt words of Andre Willis, "armed with a false narrative."[135] And Hume theorized that the promotion of good morals and social order depends on the replacement of this false narrative with a true one. Liberation from this false narrative entails freedom from the fear of God. The two main aims of ancient Epicurean philosophy were freedom from the fear of the gods and freedom from the fear of death. And Hume sought to achieve both in his writing, life, and death.

Whereas the ancient Epicureans sought to discredit popular pagan myths, moderns such as Hume used the critique of religion to discredit traditional Christian doctrine. Philosophers, such as Hume, who voiced the critique of religion and wielded an empirical methodology, sought to move beyond the Christian theology and Socratic metaphysics that had shaped the Western European imagination from the Roman Empire through the Renaissance and into the modern era. They searched for a new philosophical narrative conducive to scientific advancement, moral improvement, and political order. The new philosophical narrative they formulated, though—with its blind nature, hedonistic ethic, and theory of the social contract—was not entirely modern. It had a premodern heritage. The modern critique of religion, for example, was in many ways a reformulation of ancient Epicurean positions. The same goes for modern social contract theory on which liberal political doctrine is based. In fact, in the ancient world as in the modern world, the critique of religion has preceded social contract theory. The connection between the two in early modernity is the subject of chapter 2.

TWO

# The Epicurean Critique of Religion and the New Political Science

Hume's critique of religion—in essence—is neither entirely unique nor entirely modern.[1] As Leo Strauss noted, many modern thinkers, including "Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, Holbach, Feuerbach, Bruno, Bauer, [and] Marx," exhibited a similar attitude toward religion.[2] The contemporaries of Hobbes and Hume dutifully observed that this criticism of religion was not exclusively modern. It had a premodern heritage. It found its fullest expression, in fact, in the writings of those infamous ancients, Epicurus and Lucretius, who were beloved by the *philosophes*.[3] Strauss called the Epicurean critique of religion "the most important" source of the early modern criticism of religion.[4] And according to Strauss, this critique was "revived in essentially unaltered form in the seventeenth century, and in particular by Hobbes."[5]

The Epicurean critique of religion consists, first of all, in a fundamental moral attitude.[6] Epicurean cosmology serves a purpose, namely, to contribute to happiness by making "superstition to lie prone, trod underfoot."[7] The ancient Epicureans sought to promote *ataraxia*, "tranquility," by means of enlightenment. By describing how the universe formed from the random, undirected movement of atoms, Lucretius, in *De rerum natura*,

sought to free readers from the fear of wrathful gods. In so doing, Lucretius claimed to "teach great truths, and set out to unknot the mind from the tight strictures of religion."[8] The Epicurean style of critique, then, does not follow from science, it precedes it.[9] The Epicurean critique of religion begins with a prescientific posture, an act of the will intent on despiritualizing the world. This applies to both the ancient and modern varieties.[10] For this reason, Strauss suggested that "we understand by Epicureanism not primarily the *doctrine* of Epicurus and his school, but rather an interest natural to man, a uniform and elementary *outlook*, which merely found its classical expression in the philosophy of Epicurus."[11]

There are two essential differences between the ancient Epicurean outlook and the modern one.[12] First, Strauss ceded that in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, "premodern thought seems to come closer to modern thought than anywhere else," but the ancient form of Epicureanism is oriented toward therapy.[13] The modern form is oriented toward self-assertion. Whereas the ancients bemoaned nature's harshness, they never thought of rebelling against nature. Hobbes differed from the ancients on this point. He was generally unconcerned with the cultivation of *ataraxia* through the imitation of nature. He sought instead to increase scientific knowledge and to help human beings gain mastery over nature.[14] Hume, too, announced in his *Treatise* his desire to "march up directly to the capital or center of these sciences, to human nature itself," so that we might become "masters" of it and "extend our conquests over all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life" (T Intro.6).

Second, Hobbes sought to diffuse his critique of religion throughout society, to the masses, not just the elite. In so doing, he hoped to advance a scientific outlook that might enlighten the public, reducing not only ignorance, but also dependence on priests.[15] Hobbes, like other early modern philosophers, desired not only to master nature through the advancement of science, but also to secure peace in an age of social discord. Unlike Lucretius, whose critique of religion targeted the paganism of the ancient Romans, early modern critics of religion sought to undermine the Christian superstitions they portrayed as the root cause of the religious wars that roiled Western Europe following the Protestant Reformation. Hobbes, for example, attributed the factionalism and violence of the English civil wars to unrestrained religious passions. For this reason, Hobbes developed a philosophy designed to cleanse politics of theological speculation.[16]

"Religion"—as Strauss perceptively argued—"is *the* enemy of [Hobbes's] politics."[17]

This portrayal of religion as the enemy to knowledge, happiness, and social order is a central feature of the modern political imagination. And the effort to free politics from religion demands a sharp distinction between philosophy and theology. The Epicurean critique of religion forcefully makes this distinction. And it alleges the superiority of philosophy, or scientific knowledge, over faith, that is, nonscientific knowledge.[18]

Whereas in the Middle Ages faith and reason worked in tandem, with classical Greek metaphysics serving as a philosophical support for Christian theism, the early modern critics of religion made faith and reason irreconcilable. Hume began his first *Enquiry* harping on the Spinozist theme that philosophy must no longer serve as the handmaiden to theology. And in the concluding line of the first *Enquiry*, Hume declared that any "volume . . . of divinity or school metaphysics" that does not contain experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence should be committed to "the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (EHU 12.34). Hobbes had similarly blasted the theological politics that blended the classical Socratic and Christian traditions. He contended that natural reason does not point us to God and that the Bible is inconsistent with natural reason.[19] There is a vast chasm separating philosophy and theology. And politics ought to be firmly planted in the former.

Hobbes's state of nature theory is a form of political conventionalism, which means that justice and political authority are products of human artifice, alone. This theory is premised on "unbelief."[20] It follows naturally from the idea that nature is purposeless. According to this vision, human beings, victims of nature's cruelty, must make a home for themselves. To do so, they must serve as their own rulers, or sovereigns.

Epicureanism served as the most ancient and venerable form of this kind of political conventionalism because it provided a thoroughgoing critique of religion as its starting point.[21] Philosophers such as Bayle, Mandeville, and Hume continued Hobbes's project of grounding moral and social thought in something other than classical Christian categories. Their search for a new ground on which to theorize about social peace and cooperation—and their respective adaptations of the Epicurean idiom—is the subject of this chapter.

## PIERRE GASSENDI'S ATTEMPT TO BAPTIZE EPICUREANISM

In early modern England and France, Epicureanism was synonymous with atheism.[22] Early modern Christian apologists, like the Church Fathers before them, used Epicureanism as a standard reference point—and foil—against which to argue in favor of traditional Christian belief in a personal, providential God, who is the foundation of morals and who institutes perfect justice in the afterlife. With the rediscovery of Lucretius during the Renaissance and the popularization of Epicurean doctrine by Gassendi in seventeenth-century France, Epicurean philosophy transitioned from being a purely literary device—a representative atheist viewpoint for Christian theologians to debunk—to being, as Alan Charles Kors describes it, "a living movement of thought."[23] Beginning with Hobbes, especially, Christian theologians feared that the masses might succumb to the "Epicurean temptation," which Kors describes as the temptation "to see no divine order, to think of this world as random and purposeless, and to seek to explain all of nature without reference to God."[24]

The very word "Epicurean" likely would have conjured up a wide range of doctrines in the minds of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers in England and on the Continent, who were schooled in classical Greek and Roman philosophy, particularly the works of Cicero.[25] Epicureanism would have brought to mind the movement of eternal and invisible atoms responsible for the shift from chaos to order, the notion that happiness consists in pleasure, the belief that there is no afterlife, and the notion that God does not exercise providential care over the universe. The ancient Epicureans thought it was clear, from immediate experience, that every action is chosen to pursue pleasure or avoid pain.[26] Their commitment to "follow the lead of phenomena" in their "scientific investigations" and to avoid "empty assumptions and arbitrary principles" produced a mechanistic, or materialistic, conception of the universe, according to which all phenomena operate in accord with natural laws and without providential guidance.[27] Lucretius ridiculed the Socratic schools' admiration of the cosmos and argued that the chance construction of the world and its attendant miseries is evidence that the universe is indifferent to humanity, that there is no *logos*, reason, or providence leading nature or human nature to its proper end.[28] This combination of moral, metaphysical, and epistemological doctrines that made Epicureanism appear contrary to Socratic philosophy and to Christian

teaching is the reason why the Church Fathers and medieval theologians maligned the ancient doctrine of Epicurus for many centuries.[29]

In the seventeenth century, Gassendi challenged this view that Epicureanism was inconsistent with Christianity. But he espoused Epicurean doctrine precisely because it was inconsistent with the philosophical systems of Socrates and his followers, Plato, Aristotle, and even Zeno, the Stoic. One strand of classical Socratic philosophy—Aristotelianism—predominated in universities across Europe from 1300 to 1600.[30] Lisa Sarasohn writes that in the era of Gassendi and Hobbes, "Scholastic Aristotelianism still ruled in the universities of Europe; students were required to learn it and professors to teach it."[31] Bayle reported that, after the medieval period, Christians had "authorized" Aristotle's philosophy and portrayed enemies of Aristotle as heretics.[32] But, in the seventeenth century, the Aristotelian philosophy, which had once "surpassed, and at length swallowed up, all the rest," had "been violently shaken," in part because of the efforts of Gassendi.[33]

Gassendi first formulated a ruthless skeptical attack against Aristotle's philosophy in his *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos* (1624), which drew on the principles of the ancient Pyrrhonian skeptic Sextus Empiricus (AD 160–210). In subsequent writings, Gassendi, looking to Epicurus for guidance, produced an atomistic and mechanistic metaphysics designed to serve as a fitting framework for the burgeoning experimental science.[34] In the words of Richard W. F. Kroll, Epicurus provided Gassendi with "the myth most appropriate . . . for a suitable contemporary cosmology and methodology."[35] Gassendi developed an empirical methodology that contrasted with Cartesian rationalism. For this reason, Gassendi is sometimes cast as the French forebear of the British empirical tradition.[36] Bayle indicated that, at the dawn of the modern age, there were three competing philosophical schools vying for supremacy: "Aristotelianism," "Gassendism," and "Cartesianism."[37]

Hobbes portrayed Gassendi's system as one that is "as big as Aristotle's philosophie, but much truer."[38] And though Hobbes criticized Gassendi for propagating views that were "not different from that of Epicurus," it was Hobbes, not Gassendi, who was ruthlessly rebuked for propagating atheism.[39] Few people questioned the sincerity of Gassendi's faith, because Gassendi, a Catholic priest, so clearly subordinated Epicureanism to Christian doctrine.[40] Nicolas Taxil, for example, in his funeral oration for Gassendi, delivered on November 14, 1655, declared that Gas-

sendi corrected the "errors of Epicurus . . . whenever he did not find them in conformity with the spirit of Christianity." Taxil insisted that Epicurus "never had a greater enemy than M. Gassendi when he [Epicurus] declared himself the enemy of Providence."[41]

Gassendi thought Epicurus erred by claiming atoms were infinite and eternal, moving without rational guidance. But he believed there was nothing objectionable about combining Epicurus's teachings on atoms and the void with Christian belief in a supreme Creator and Designer.[42] Gassendi saw everywhere signs of creation—the existence of animal organs, for example, made with rational intention, for definite purposes. Refusing to dispense with final causes (that is, natural end goals toward which things are intrinsically ordered), Gassendi added to the Epicurean philosophy something foreign to it, namely, an incorporeal God, who imbued the universe with purpose and populated the world with human beings, possessing immortal souls and made in the image of God.[43]

Although Gassendi tried to incorporate Epicurus's maxims into a broader Christian vision, many orthodox divines thought this "impossible."[44] And their criticisms were valid in the sense that the defense of Christian orthodoxy, from the perspective of Epicurean philosophy, looks like an irrational leap of faith, a resort to belief—in immaterial substance, for example—with no foundation in reason.[45] There is a stark division between theology and philosophy in Epicurean thought, so that, on the basis of reason, alone, all that can be said to exist are atoms in rapid and random movement. Belief in anything more is an act of blind faith.

Gassendi's Epicureanism entailed not only a distinct metaphysical and epistemological perspective, but also a corresponding approach to moral and political life. Gassendi, like Epicurus, advised against political participation, because it would heighten anxiety. But Epicurean philosophy is not necessarily *apolitical*.[46] Although ancient Epicureanism did not produce a theory of ideal regimes, as the Socratic schools did, ancient Epicureanism did produce a coherent political philosophy.[47] After all, the kind of well-ordered, self-contained philosophical garden in which the Epicurean community desired to pursue natural pleasures also required a traditional political community to protect it. Epicurus articulated a series of influential sayings on the topic of justice, which he regarded not as anything in itself, but as a pact promoting "a kind of mutual advantage in the dealings of men with one another."[48]

Thomas Stanley (1625–78) included Gassendi's reconstruction of Epicurus's positions on justice and political society in his *History of Philosophy* (1660), which was one of the primary avenues by which Epicureanism was introduced to an English audience. Stanley, who wrote "after the example of the Learned Gassendus," dedicated significantly more space in his *History* to Epicureanism than any other school of thought.[49] Stanley's *History*, which was part of Charles Mackie's curriculum at Edinburgh when Hume was studying law, includes a complete translation of Gassendi's *Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma* (1649).[50]

Stanley's *History* made it clear that the central feature of Epicurean political theory is not necessarily some *original* contract, but the conventions that human beings form to lift themselves from savagery to civilization. Gassendi's Epicurean narrative begins, like the ancient one, "in the beginning," when human beings lived "like wild beasts," "continually warring and contending with one another," until they devised an agreement by which to secure private property. Gassendi argued that the Epicurean narrative of society's origins is unique in that it derives "the very beginning of right . . . from utility or profit."[51]

Justice, from this Epicurean perspective, is an instrument that permits individual pleasure-seekers to engage in a mutual nonaggression pact in order to live more comfortably. They engage in this pact when they become "sensible, how much greater utility would from thence accrue to them living in mutual society."[52] Instead of having "an equal right over every thing" outside of society, individuals in society secure a quiet way of living in accordance with laws that are created for each person's "benefit and advantage," allowing them to do as they will with what they possess in all areas untouched by law.[53] The laws of justice are discovered empirically, conforming to "whatsoever is by experience found profitable to a mutual society." Gassendi argued that "natural right or just is no other, than a symbol of utility, or such an utility agreed upon by concurrence of votes . . . for nothing is completely just, but what the society, by common consent or agreement, hath decreed to be observed."[54]

According to the Epicurean narrative of the origin of justice and society, then, human beings are pleasure-seeking beings in a purposeless universe who save themselves from misery by inventing the rules of justice and learning how to enforce them. In ancient Epicurean cosmology, of course, human progress does not correspond to the indefinite progress of

the universe. Lucretius wrote in *De rerum natura* that the universe will eventually collapse and that all human efforts will disintegrate along with it.[55] The Epicureans did, however, possess a narrative concerning the advancement of human society from barbarism to civilization, and this is the element of Epicurean political thought that the moderns were most inclined to appropriate.

Gassendi used Christian scripture to endorse Epicurean ethical and political thought. It would seem difficult to square Epicurus's moral advice—to pursue continual pleasure—with Christian teaching, but Gassendi tried. He defended the Epicurean view that "pleasure is the chief end" by citing the book of Genesis, wherein "God himself in the beginning planted a garden or paradise of pleasure."[56] Similarly, Gassendi made his Epicurean progress narrative, which begins with the state of nature, or "first age of the world," consistent with scripture. Gassendi described the "first age of the world" as the first age following humanity's fall from paradise, that is, the garden of Eden.[57]

Although Gassendi's Epicurean political narrative seems neutral on the question of religion, as if it can be planted within a Christian belief system with only slight amendment, it departs from the classical Christian tradition by taking barbarism, not an Edenic paradise (as in the Christian account) or humanity's rational capacities (as in the Aristotelian account), as its starting point. Though the Epicurean narrative begins with nature, its conception of nature is not normative. Instead, the Epicurean state of nature is a state of conflict to be subdued or overcome.[58]

By regarding "the first age of the world" as the state of nature, Gassendi made the Christian idea of paradise and the pagan idea of the golden age irrelevant to politics. The ancient Roman poet Ovid had described the golden age as that time in which human beings had "uncorrupted reason . . . and, with a native bent, did good pursue." In the golden age, Ovid wrote, man pursued the good without the threat of force, because he followed the "law of man [that] was written in his breast."[59] The ancient Roman Stoic Seneca had written that in the golden age government was committed to the wisest, while human beings neither "corrupted nor debauched in their principles . . . followed the dictates of nature."[60] The Stoics commonly asserted that, though human wickedness—specifically the love of gain—destroyed this era of primeval excellence, the golden age continued to serve as a model of virtue and good governance.[61] Aquinas

theorized in a similar manner, idealizing humanity's first state as the "age of natural law," which, in biblical terms, was the Edenic paradise existing prior to the Flood.[62]

Gassendi, on the other hand, held with Epicurus that human beings in their natural state are neither social nor morally upright. Gassendi explicitly rejected the idea, which he credited to Lactantius (250–325), the Christian philosopher, that human beings naturally join together as a result of "the very feeling of humanity itself," which makes human beings "desirous of communion and society."[63] In the *Divine Institutes*, Lactantius argued that "God, since he is kind, wished us to be a social animal."[64] "Therefore," Lactantius continued, "kindness is the greatest bond of human society."[65] In Lactantius's narrative, savages are defined broadly, not only as those who live outside society, but also as those who live inside society, but who violate the universal brotherhood of human beings—all of whom are made in the image of God—by injuring their neighbors rather than seeking their neighbors' good. The savage is thereby distinguished primarily by his willingness to transgress the natural law written in the human heart.

In Gassendi's Epicurean narrative, savages are defined more narrowly, not primarily as those who violate the natural law, but as those who have not yet formed societies. This means that they have not yet created the convention of justice that guarantees the protection of private property. Savages, in this case, are those who live in isolation and conflict, who are ignorant of what is advantageous for them. They live outside society, because they are not yet sensible of the advantages of living in society. Gassendi's writing exemplifies the Epicurean focus on progress and profit, the same unyielding focus that caused Lactantius to lament that the Epicureans "measure all things not by the truth itself, but by present utility."[66]

The definition of the "savage," or "barbarian," had been subject to enhanced scrutiny in the early modern period after the discovery of the New World, which coincided with the gradual replacement of Aristotelianism by the new experimental science in European universities. The varied philosophical responses to Amerindian society reveal the extent to which the Epicurean perspective on human progress differed from the primary alternative, namely, the classical Socratic perspective, which had been transmitted through Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism, all of which, to varying degrees, had been incorporated into mainstream Christian theology by the medieval period. For the sixteenth-century Spanish Scholastic

theologians, who were at the forefront of the effort to provide a philosophical treatment of Amerindian customs and practices, Aristotelian psychology seemed to possess all the resources necessary to account for the kind of barbarism exhibited—according to prevalent travel accounts—by some Amerindian tribes.

Among the Amerindian tribes, some cultures, such as those on the Caribbean islands, seemed less advanced than other native cultures, such as those in Mexico and Peru.[67] Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546), using Aristotle's *Politics* as his guide, looked for various signs of civilization in order to gauge the level of progress various Amerindian societies had attained.[68] These signs included the presence of the family, magistrates, systems of exchange, and religion, which, together, revealed a fitting application of speculative reason to the perpetuation of society, the procurement of resources, and the pursuit of the good life.[69] Though Vitoria admitted that among some tribes there is "defective intelligence" in regard to self-government, the liberal and mechanical arts, and even dietary habits, the Amerindians "are not of unsound mind, but have, according to their kind, the use of reason."[70] According to Vitoria's conception of the hierarchical ordering of life, it is by virtue of humanity's reasoning powers that they reflect God's image, meaning that human progress is marked by the degree to which they cultivate those rational powers that they share with God rather than the sensitive powers they share with beasts.[71] Human moral and political life, in this case, is judged by the degree to which it promotes the rule of humanity's higher powers over its lower powers.

## THE MONSTER OF MALMESBURY AND HIS MASTER LUCRETIUS

Bayle wrote that Hobbes, after observing the onset of the English civil wars in the early 1640s, "sought out an agreeable retreat at Paris, where he might quietly philosophize with Father Mersennus, Gassendus, and some other great men. There he composed his treatise de Cive."[72] The transition from barbarism to civilization is one of the primary themes of *De cive*. In fact, the bottom half of the frontispiece of the 1642 edition of *De cive* depicts the drastic difference between savagery and society.[73] This frontispiece, which depicts the savage person as a Native American and the civilized person as a Western European, shows that Hobbes equated savagery

with warfare and civilization with peace. Hobbes's political theory, like Gassendi's, is framed around a narrative of the progress of human society and adopts, as supporting evidence, the purported savagery of Native American tribes.

Hobbes presented *De cive* as the first authentic work of political science, the goal of which was to discover the causes of savagery and of civilization, of war and of peace.[74] Since Hobbes's life corresponded with the events of the tumultuous seventeenth-century English political scene, including the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1639–53), the Interregnum (1649–1660), and the Restoration (1660), he was doubtlessly interested in finding a reliable formula for peace. And he purported to find one in his deductive political science.

Hobbes subscribed to the resolutive-compositive method, by which he broke down political authority into its constitutive features (the state of nature) and reconstructed it. This method relied on a specific conception of the human person. For Hobbes, there was no distinction between the natural human being and the civilized human being. Because human nature is everywhere the same, natural man and civil man differ not in their nature but in their circumstances. According to Hobbes's science of man, "the beginning of all . . . voluntary motions" resides in the passions, that is, desire.[75] The passions, which are produced by internal motion, direct all human beings toward self-preservation, toward what "pleaseth" them and away from what "troubleth" them.[76] Hobbes, who denied the existence of the *summum bonum*, denied the ancient Epicurean assertion, repeated by Gassendi, that pleasure is the supreme good. But Hobbes did subscribe to a modified Epicurean psychology by maintaining that the pursuit of pleasure is humanity's primary motive to action. Whereas the ancient Epicureans assumed that human beings desired *kataleptic* pleasure—that is, tranquility or the absence of pain—Hobbes declared that human beings desire *kinetic* pleasure, meaning they are susceptible to "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death."[77]

According to Hobbes, this hyperindividualized pursuit of pleasure (and power, a means by which to attain pleasure) was the reason there was no political union, or large commonwealth, in man's original state. Hobbes did concede that even in the state of nature there is a degree of concord that pertains within families. Still, these small families do not evince the voluntary submission of wills to an absolute sovereign that, for Hobbes,

was the mark of a legitimate political union.[78] In the state of nature, where every man pursues what pleases him and avoids what troubles him, every man "hath right to all things" that he can procure for his well-being, ease, and convenience. The state of nature is savage and warlike, consisting of "slaughter, solitude, and the want of all things."[79] According to Hobbes, "irresistible might in the state of nature is right."[80] The state of warfare in which human beings naturally find themselves is a result of "the ill condition, which man by mere nature is actually placed in."[81]

The primary cause of this condition of warfare, according to Hobbes, is the lack of mutual fear to keep people in check. "Unless they be restrained by some power," Hobbes averred, "they will always be making war upon one another."[82] The solution to warfare lies entirely in the creation of institutions that generate the circumstance of peace. In particular, the cause of peace is the convention by which human beings form a union for the sake of material benefit, transferring their right to self-preservation to the sovereign whom they agree to obey in all matters for the sake of peace. The sovereign, by wielding the sword, places all subjects under that "mutual fear" that "is necessary for peace."[83] Without the sovereign, human beings "return again to their former estate of hostility," in which there are no laws of justice.[84]

Hobbes asserted that the path from barbarism to civilization requires the "arbitrary institution" of the sovereign, the political convention that is eminently useful because it makes human beings sociable. "Concord amongst men," Hobbes contended, "is artificial, and by way of covenant."[85] Having drawn upon the "many experiences" in which human beings have used the words "just" and "unjust," Hobbes concluded, with Gassendi, that "*jus* and *utile*, right and profit, is the same thing."[86] Whereas Gassendi described a two-step process, in which the convention of justice is formed first, followed by the convention of government, Hobbes combined these steps. He argued that justice and government form in a single instant. There is no hope for a just society without the exercise of force by an absolute sovereign. Whereas Gassendi asserted that pacts protecting private property secure peace in society, Hobbes emphasized that the institution of the state, legitimized by consent, is required to enforce that pact and maintain peace.

Hobbes's political science is not purely rationalistic. It is informed by historical experience.[87] The state of nature, which grounds Hobbesian political science, is supposed to mimic the state of war that truly exists in the

world in the absence of a sovereign. When Hobbes described "the natural condition of mankind," which served as the starting point of his political theorizing, he was referring to any condition in which human beings have not yet established a sovereign.[88] The natural condition of mankind, then, is not only, presumably, the primitive condition of mankind but also any condition in which human beings do not live together in a political society in mutual fear of a sovereign power.[89] Hobbes referred to specific historical situations that served as concrete examples of the state of nature. Hobbes argued that we know what the state of nature is "both by the experience of savage nations that live at this day, and by the histories of our ancestors, the old inhabitants of Germany and other now civil countries, where we find the people few and short lived, and without the ornaments and comforts of life, which by peace and society are usually invented and procured."[90] The Germanic tribes from whom the British were descended were once rude and wild, before being civilized gradually, in stages, over many years.[91]

Hobbes acknowledged that reality did not neatly conform to his normative theory. In most cases, Hobbes admitted, sovereignty is established by acquisition (that is, force) rather than by institution (that is, voluntary consent).[92] Still, Hobbes treated experience—which he gleaned from contemporary travel literature, and from ancient and contemporary historians—as empirical confirmation for his political science.[93]

Travel literature abounded in seventeenth-century England, and the writings of José de Acosta and Sir Francis Drake contained descriptions of Native Americans as wild beasts and brute savages.[94] Hobbes used these contemporary instances of so-called savagery to defend his claim that human beings live in a warlike condition in the absence of a stable government. Hobbes mentioned accounts of "the savage people in many places of America" in order to testify to what life is like when there is "no government at all."[95] Hobbes asserted that, in this "present century," the "Americas" had provided his contemporaries with an image of life in the state of nature, with its brutality and lack of ornamentation.[96] Thomas Tenison (1636–1715), an Anglican priest and eventual archbishop of Canterbury, rebuked Hobbes for offering a simplistic portrayal of the savage. "The condition of human nature is not so very rude as you seem to represent it," Tenison argued. Tenison also referred to *The Epitome of Trogus Pompeius*, by the Latin historian Justin, who claimed that even some mores among the supposedly savage Scythians were superior to those of the "civilized" Greeks.[97]

Hobbes developed insights regarding the transition from barbarism to civilization by consulting not only contemporary histories but also the works of classical historians. Hobbes was deeply familiar with Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*, a work that he translated from the Greek.[98] He also read Gassendi's works. And in these works, Hobbes encountered the Epicurean progress narrative—a conjectural account—which Gassendi reworked from book 5 of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.[99] The Earl of Clarendon (1609–74), in fact, suggested that Hobbes followed "the fancy and supposition of heathen philosophers," that is, the Epicureans, when he described the state of nature as savage and warlike.[100] And Thomas Creech (1659–1700), in his translation of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, proclaimed, "From his time to ours, I know none so like [Lucretius] as our poet and philosopher of Malmesbury."[101] Years later, Bishop William Warburton would claim that Hobbes "breathed the exact spirit of his master Lucretius."[102]

Though Hobbes never referred to himself as an Epicurean, he was accused of repeating the Epicurean story about how human beings develop the laws of justice as the result of a utility-calculation after having lived in a state of conflict.[103] Ralph Cudworth charged Hobbes with espousing an Epicurean form of political conventionalism, because Hobbes denied that the laws of justice apply to human beings in the state of nature and also in society.[104] Tenison, too, posited that "Epicurus . . . teacheth the same original of just and unjust with Mr. Hobbes," and he argued, with Cudworth, that even in the state of nature human beings would be capable of discerning and obeying the natural laws of justice.[105] Tenison wrote that the state of nature as depicted by Hobbes is "the contrivance of [his] own fancy." The idea that human beings wandered like wild beasts before forming societies merely for security and the idea that "good and evil, just and unjust" spring only from the "pacts and covenants" are none other than the "romance" purveyed by Epicurus and "his compurgator, Gassendus."[106]

Hobbes's Epicurean account, according to these critics, is one-dimensional and unfaithful to the truth of human nature and human society. In reality, Tenison argued, human beings, who are born under government, are capable of abiding by the law of God, which is written on their hearts. And, Tenison insisted, neither natural law nor civil law is reducible to the law of profit, or "private utility," that is, the interest one has in his own preservation.[107] Hutcheson would later argue that the opinions of "the old Epicureans" were "revived by Mr. Hobbes," because Hobbes argued that

human beings form society and devise the laws of justice for the sake of private advantage.[108]

Although Cudworth and Tenison charged Hobbes with denying the reality of moral distinctions and ignoring the presence of a natural law that enables human beings to ascertain objective and universal principles of conduct, Hobbes intimated that he was only describing man in a fallen, or depraved, state. Like Gassendi, Hobbes attempted to reconcile his portrayal of the primitive state of nature with the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve's fall from paradise. In the Latin edition of *Leviathan* (1668), Hobbes replaced references to Native Americans, which he had used to illustrate the savage state of nature in the English version of *Leviathan* (1651), with a reference to Cain's murder of Abel. This incident resulted in Cain's exile and his building the first city mentioned in the Bible.

Despite this effort to portray the state of nature as a postlapsarian condition, several Anglican theologians persisted in censuring Hobbes for contradicting the biblical account of human origins. Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653), for example, contended that Hobbes's narrative opposed "the truth of the history of the creation."[109] The Anglican theologian John Bramhall (1594–1663), meanwhile, asserted that the primitive state of nature as Hobbes presented it did not in fact exist, because human beings were first created as rational and social beings in the state of paradise. Bramhall argued that human beings are born into and perpetually live in a political society of some kind, which is how they are by their very nature designed to live. Bramhall also challenged Hobbes's usage of the word "nature," arguing that nature is representative of the human being's end and perfection, not a wretched prepolitical condition that is savage and warlike.[110]

These Anglican theologians faulted Hobbes for inadequately aligning his story of society's development with the biblical narrative, according to which Adam, the first man, was created by God in a state of sinlessness and perfection in the garden of Eden. Those Anglicans with an Aristotelian bent, moreover, chastised Hobbes for failing to define nature normatively.[111] On a more practical level, Anglican clergy accused Hobbes of violating their version of orthodoxy in matters of church governance, since Hobbes seemed to support the ecclesiology of the Independents, rather than divine right of the episcopacy, in *Leviathan*.[112] Furthermore, the Arminians, who predominated among Anglicans under the leadership of

Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645) before the English civil wars, criticized Hobbes for endorsing a deterministic view of human behavior closely related to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.[113] During the Restoration, the Anglican clergy, seeking to regain the influence they enjoyed in the Laudian days, tried to refute deterministic doctrines, such as Hobbes's, which resembled those of the Presbyterians, who had thrown England into chaos by inflaming public passions in favor of republican forms of civil and ecclesial government.

Hobbes's narrative of human progress downplayed the theological concerns of the Christian narrative of creation, fall, and redemption and instead emphasized the earthly journey from barbarism to civilization that is made possible by factitious institutions. Hobbes's narrative of the state of nature and the origin of justice represented a secular mythology of fall and redemption, a new genesis narrative that revealed how human beings, by rationally seeking their own advantage, had consented to an institutional framework that enabled them to satisfy their desires in a peaceful, rather than destructive, way. Sheldon Wolin described Hobbes's political narrative as "a kind of political version of Genesis, without sacral overtones and without sin, but a fall nevertheless, from the highest level of human achievement, life in civil society."[114] And Michael Oakeshott remarked that *Leviathan* captures "in a new myth the Augustinian epic of the Fall and Salvation of mankind."[115]

Hobbes not only replaced the traditional Christian myth of fall and redemption with a new one, but also portrayed traditional Christianity as a source of strife and as an obstacle to civilization. The institutional solution that Hobbes offered for the promotion of peace assumed that religion is a destructive force, not a civilizing one; an invention of the passions, not a product of truth-seeking; a threat to morals, not their source.[116] Hobbes had sought an institutional formula for political peace, but for the formula to work, the vulgar masses would need to fear violent death above all else.[117] This fear of violent death in the state of nature would lead them to willingly sacrifice their natural liberty and obey the absolute sovereign alone. But the people do not fear violent death above all. Hobbes readily admitted that "the fear of darkness, and ghosts, is greater than other fears."[118] When the people fear invisible powers more than violent death, they are inclined to obey God rather than the state. The allegiance to church over state is what Hobbes blamed for the violence that pervaded

English politics in the seventeenth century. In order to consolidate all power under the state, Hobbes would need to turn people away from religion—and the classical Greek metaphysics that gave credence to belief in invisible powers—and toward natural science, the search for efficient causes. And he grounded this science on one-world realism, a materialist vision that, like the Epicurean one, contends that matter is all that exists and that all phenomena can be explained by matter in motion.[119]

Hobbes wanted to free the public not just from fear of hell but from all claims of "ghostly authority" that might divert their allegiance from the earthly sovereign.[120] In order to ensure the supremacy of the civil authority, he denied not only the validity of the "ghostly authority" but also the veracity of all spiritual reality.[121] In parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes used his materialist philosophy, according to which there is no incorporeal substance, as a lens through which to interpret the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.[122] He argued that ghosts, spirits, and phantasms have no independent existence, but exist only in the human mind. He explained all alleged communication with God, for example, in the dreams and visions of the Old Testament prophets, with reference to the internal operation of the imagination "in their sleep, or in an extasy."[123]

Just as Hobbes explained dreams and visions, which make people believe that spirits exist, through the movements of interior organs that affect our imagination and memory, he explained alleged miracles by means of the natural outworking of the laws of nature.[124] He declared that "the same thing, may be a miracle to one, and not to another. And thence it is, that ignorant, and superstitious men make great wonders of those works, which other men, knowing to proceed from nature, (which is not the immediate, but the ordinary work of God,) admire not at all."[125] For Hobbes, then, the routine works of nature act as a substitute for the activity of God. He explained that all events can be shown by science to be regular and predictable rather than arbitrary and unpredictable.[126] And this dispels fear of unknown, invisible powers.

Though Hobbes claimed that the laws of nature, which are discoverable by experimental reasoning, can explain all phenomena, he still held that God is the first cause of the universe, who is responsible for instituting the laws of nature: "We can have no conception or image of the Deity," but can only assert "that there is a God," by which is meant, only, a *first cause*.[127]

Although Hobbes seemed to indicate that natural reason can lead individuals to belief in God as a first cause, he flatly stated in *De cive* that the exercise of natural reason leads to atheism, not theism.[128] That is because his substance monism excludes God from the universe.

Hobbes asserted that God is corporeal. If he weren't, then he would be a "spright or phantasm, which is nothing."[129] As a body, however, God is either part of the universe, or the universe itself, because he cannot exist beyond the universe.[130] If God is *part* of the universe, though, then he cannot be infinite, "for whatsoever is in place, is bounded, and finite."[131] God also cannot be everywhere at once.[132] We also cannot say that God *is* the universe, because a cause must be distinct from its effect: "To say the world is God is to say there is no cause of it, that is, no God."[133] The Spinozist claim that God is the universe, then, is an atheistic one. But Hobbes's materialist system is equally atheistic. Although Hobbes described God as the first cause, he could not locate God anywhere. And in his materialist universe, to be *nowhere* is to be *nothing*.[134]

But if God is *nowhere* and *nothing*, then how did people begin believing in him? Hobbes explained that religious belief originated in the ignorance of causes, in the credulity of the masses, and in the willingness of priests, selfishly seeking to further their welfare and attain power over others, to exploit the vulgar, superstitious populace. He blamed the English civil wars on the behavior of religious actors. He portrayed the love of dominion as the primary driver of priestly action. Clerics are no different than others who are driven by "the love of power naturally implanted in mankind."[135] The Presbyterian ministers, for example, preached only that which was of "profit to themselves." They desired to usurp spiritual government from Rome and civil government from the king, all under the "cloak of godliness."[136] Other religious groups, including Independents, Quakers, and Fifth-Monarchy Men, the last of which was a radical Puritan sect that sought to establish the kingship of Christ, all possessed an inordinate zeal for liberty that, when acted upon, threw England into chaos: "A great part of them, namely, the Presbyterian ministers, throughout the whole war, instigated the people against the king; so did also independent and other fanatic ministers . . . who, by a long practiced histrionic faculty, preached up the rebellion so powerfully."[137]

Hobbes presented the *Leviathan*, the state, as the only beast capable of restraining the *Behemoth*, religion. But he thought it must do so with

the aid of philosophy. Priests can only manipulate the vulgar masses if the people believe in miracles. And the masses will believe in miracles only if they have a "want of science, that is, ignorance of causes [that] disposeth, or rather constraineth a man to rely on the advice, and authority of others," namely, priests.[138] Priests have an interest, then, in opposing scientific reason, since widespread ignorance enables them to take advantage of the "stupidity of the people."[139] It is ignorance that makes the masses believe that priests possess special insight into the existence and nature of the Deity, the author of the laws of nature who is allegedly capable of intruding upon those very same laws in order to accomplish the good of those who believe.

Hobbes marked a clear distinction between faith and philosophy. He stated that, whereas the rules of religion are derived from "Holy Scripture," the rules of philosophy are derived from "natural reason."[140] This is a characteristic feature of the modern critique of religion, which points to the reliability of scientific investigation and the unreliability of human testimony regarding divine revelation.[141] Clergy, according to Hobbes, do not deal in true science or philosophy, since they "have little knowledge in physics, and none at all in mathematics." Philosophic truth, meanwhile, comes from "long observation and study in astronomy, geometry, and arithmetic." Clerics treat only matters of faith, or revelation. Just as natural philosophy ought to remain untouched by revelation, Hobbes argued that religion should be absent "points of natural philosophy."[142]

Hobbes explained that, whereas philosophy is the means by which to seek out natural causes, faith is the means by which to gain insight into the nature and being of God. Faith, however, is dependent on revelation, and revelation is always mediated. Faith, then, is never placed directly in God, but in the testimony of human beings, particularly as it is documented in scripture. Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*, "Whatsoever we believe, upon no other reason, than what is drawn from authority of men only, and their writings; whether they be sent from God or not, is faith in men only."[143] And this claim is consistent with that which he made in the earlier *Elements of Law* (1650): "The acknowledgement of the Scriptures to be the word of God, is not evidence, but faith; and faith . . . consisteth in the trust we have in other men."[144] If religious faith is reducible to faith in earthly authority, then, the primary question regarding religious authority is this: In what earthly authority ought human beings to place their trust?

Hobbes argued that the sovereign power should serve as the judge of divine revelation, determining whether an alleged miracle or prophetic utterance is genuine or fraudulent.[145] According to Hobbes, the sovereign ought to have charge over all scripture and right doctrine, and the sovereign, in this matter as in every other, ought to render its judgment "to prevent discord and civil war." This, for Hobbes, aligns with the example of Constantine, who sanctioned the content of the Nicene Creed in the fourth century in order to promote peace, not necessarily to establish the truth of the matter.[146]

Hobbes, then, who denied the existence of any justice in the state of nature and who located the origin of morality in pacts, rather than in religion, rejected the idea that human beings are subject to the moral standards established by a sovereign God who governs even in the state of nature. Human beings are their own sovereigns, making their own laws, actualizing their own regimes, to accomplish their own ends, namely, self-preservation and commodious living.

Political legitimacy, within the Hobbesian framework, depends on the standard of utility. Individuals agree to form an absolute sovereign power to govern themselves because it is useful, because it keeps the peace. The Christian religion, too, is judged not by its truth, but by its usefulness. And Hobbes judged the Christian religion—in its multitudinous sects—to be not only useless but also positively harmful to political peace and order, if not meticulously handled by the sovereign.

For this reason, the English clergyman William Lucy (1594–1677) declared that Hobbes seemed "to shake hands [with Epicurus]" not only by claiming that happiness consists of "sensuall pleasure . . . in this world onely," but also by regarding it as "the greatest piece of happinesse, to abhorre Religion and contemne it."[147] The English Presbyterian minister John Leland (1691–1766) observed that Hobbes struck at the "foundation of all religion, both natural and revealed."[148] And John Edwards (1637–1716), another Calvinist minister, determined that among the "cabals and assemblies of profess'd atheists" gathering in England, "Mr. Hobbes" was "their great master and lawgiver," whose writings served as "scripture."[149] At the turn of the eighteenth century, Bayle, the *philosophe* of Rotterdam, made the controversial—and watershed—suggestion that a society of atheists would be preferable to a society of Christians. He pronounced, in effect, that a society that followed the gospel of Epicurus and Hobbes would be superior to one that followed the gospel of Christ.

## BAYLE AND THE SOCIETY OF VIRTUOUS ATHEISTS

Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) is best known as an advocate of toleration. And he certainly experienced the unsavory consequences of the state's enforcement of religion. In fact, Bayle's familial and professional relationships suffered because of his heterodox religious opinions.

When Bayle was twenty-one, he converted to Catholicism for eighteen months, before reverting to the Presbyterianism of his youth. He taught briefly at the Academy of Sedan, a Huguenot academy that King Louis XIV shut down in 1681. This was four years prior to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), which had granted civil rights to France's Protestant minority. Bayle's controversial anti-Catholic writings led French authorities to place Bayle's brother in prison, where he eventually died. Bayle's alleged atheism severed his friendship with the Huguenot theologian Pierre Jurieu. And the ensuing feud with Jurieu cost Bayle his teaching job in Rotterdam.

Bayle sustained himself by the profits from his expansive and immensely popular *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, which has been called "the Bible of the eighteenth century."[150] Bayle's *Dictionary* served as an authoritative guide in the history of ideas and oriented philosophical discourse throughout the Enlightenment. Bayle displayed his impressive learning in each dictionary entry, replete with lengthy footnotes, witty asides, cross-references to other entries, and arguments for and against a wide variety of positions.[151] In fact, Bayle unleashed a skeptical assault on all philosophical systems, ruthlessly ambushing system after system with penetrating questions that revealed the irresolvable contradictions at the heart of every philosophy constructed by human reason. Bayle remarked that "our reason is only suitable for making everything perplexing and for raising doubts about everything. No sooner has it built something than it provides the means of destroying it."[152] Voltaire referred to Bayle, the erudite dismantler of received opinions, as the greatest dialectician to ever live.[153]

Bayle's first book did not have his name attached to it, but after the publication of the second edition, titled *Various Thoughts, Written on the Occasion of the Comet That Appeared in the Month of December, 1680* (1683), Bayle's authorship became public knowledge. The book's argument, that a society of atheists is preferable to a society of Christians, had circulated in clandestine literature. But when Bayle popularized it, as David Wootton

observes, it became "public property."[154] And the argument inevitably mired him in controversy. Bayle, the provocateur, knew his thesis would generate ample opposition, since he was directly questioning the commonly held assumption that religion, as the foundation of morals, is a civilizing force in society.

In late 1680, a comet appeared over Europe causing many curious—and perhaps petrified—individuals to ask whether the comet possessed any theological significance or portended some disaster. In *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, Bayle, in the form of eleven letters signed by a man named "A," argued that comets are natural phenomena. They have no spiritual significance. They are not sent by God to convert pagans to Christianity. Comets appeared in the ancient world, after all. And in the ancient world, fearful individuals, who would have responded to a comet by seeking solace in the invisible world, would have begun worshipping pagan gods, not the Christian God. They would have become idolaters. Surely God would not send a comet to inspire devotion to pagan gods.

When surveying the misdeeds of the ancients, Bayle suggested that the perpetrators—murderers and poisoners, such as Nero, for example—were not atheists, but were idolators, whose beliefs and practices aligned with common Roman superstitions.[155] These pagans committed horrible crimes, even though they sacrificed to the gods. But their religion did not curb this behavior.[156] Only "human laws," which provide "a brake stronger than that of religion," can "repress . . . perversity." And human laws repress perversity because they have teeth. They threaten punishment.

Christianity appears to be vastly superior to idolatry, given that it is the "true religion which . . . brings that of converting man to God, of making him fight against his passions, and of making him virtuous."[157] But Christianity does not always bring about moral conversion. The panic over the comet testified to this. A Christian should live virtuously without dependence on physical signs or portents. Ideally, a Christian would order her life toward the end of the eternal enjoyment of God. But theory and practice diverge sharply.

If a visitor from another world had to guess the morality of the Christian, based on Christian doctrine, then he would expect to see acts of mercy, meekness, and charity. But "experience" proves this is not the case. Experience shows that "we do not guide ourselves by the lights of the conscience."[158] Bayle pointed to instances of Christians behaving badly to

argue that believers are as immoral as idolators. He described Christians acting as barbarous and warmongering crusaders. He mentioned Christian women, who, though superficially chaste, are quick to act lustfully in private. He depicted Christians who, though they confess the Creed and believe in miracles, asking for intercession from the saints and going to Mass, continue to live "the most disorderly" lives by swearing, dueling, cheating, lying, and committing adultery.

If conscience were the rule of conduct, then Christians would exceed all others in the practice of virtue. But they succumb to vice. They even seem to relish it. And the fear of hell does not stop them. This observation led Bayle to articulate his signature principle: that "*it is not the mind's general opinions that determine our actions but the passions present in the heart.*"[159] Actions, according to Bayle, do not conform to beliefs. Instead, human beings act in accord with their temperament.[160] This is the uniform and stable law on which he based his moral and political thought.

Religious views are diverse; human behavior is not. Turks, Moors, Jews, Muslims, and Christians all abide by different doctrines and participate in different ceremonies, but they act in a similar fashion, driven by "ambition, avarice, envy, [and] the desire to avenge oneself."[161] When human law is focused on managing these drives, all of which derive from that one passion—self-love, or pride—that is ingrained in each person's constitution, it successfully promotes order. But when human law becomes subservient to a particular religion, it becomes persecutory, because a religionist is driven by self-love as much as anyone else. And the religionist often wants to avenge himself on people of opposing faiths. Religious faith, then, whether in the form of Judaism, Islam, or Christianity, not only fails to make people virtuous but also causes civil strife insofar as it instills anger in the soul against those who profess a competing religion. This is the source of the persecutory spirit.[162]

Bayle relied on "history and the course of common life" to argue that human beings pursue pleasure, in the form of riches, power, or—what is perhaps the greatest mental pleasure—the esteem of others.[163] This concern for temporal welfare is, according to Bayle, the most effective curb on corruption. It is simply in an individual's self-interest not to violate the law, which would subject one to physical punishment, or to violate social standards, which would subject one to the mental punishment of shame.

Bayle argued that even if a city such as Paris were full of Christians listening to "the remonstrances of preachers and confessors," this society

of Christians would "soon be destroyed," reduced "to the saddest condition in the world," if it were not for human laws that restrain vice and impose order.[164] No matter what our beliefs or convictions are, we are driven by the same motives, including pride, greed, and ambition. And human law, rather than religious law, manages these passions best. By separating moral virtue and political order from religious belief, Bayle paved the way for his controversial claim that an atheist, who denies divine providence as revealed in biblical religion, can be both a good man and a good citizen.

In late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, such a claim seemed shocking.[165] After the failed attempts by Presbyterians and Puritans to establish a godly republic during the Interregnum, there was less public support for strident government enforcement of morals. This led to the rise of libertinism in King Charles II's court. It also produced an increase in delinquency—including whoring, swearing, and excessive drinking—in inns, taverns, and coffeehouses, particularly in London. English ministers interpreted this debauchery as a significant threat to public order. They thought no society could prosper economically if the people were lazy; politically, if the people were factious; militarily, if the people were spineless. Supposing that bad beliefs lead to bad conduct, and vice versa, these ministers railed against atheism—the corrupter of morals—and defended Christian orthodoxy—the protector of morals.

John Locke, too, supposed that atheists should not be tolerated because of the dangers they posed to the political order.[166] Locke asserted that "promises, covenants and oaths, which are the bonds of humane society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all."[167] Belief in the Deity, for Locke, was not merely a speculative opinion, but "the foundation of all morality," so that whoever rejected it was "to be considered no other than one of the most dangerous sorts of wild beasts, and so incapable of all society."[168] For this reason, Locke's proposed system of toleration did not extend to atheists, who, lacking moral restraints, could not be trusted.

Richard Bentley, in his Boyle lectures, argued that "no atheist, as such, can be a true friend, an affectionate relation, or a loyal subject." Bentley continued: "And if atheism should be supposed to become universal in this nation (which seems to be designed and endeavoured, though we know the gates of hell shall not be able to prevail), farewell all ties of friendship and principles of honour; all love for our country and loyalty to our prince; nay, farewell all government and society it self, all profession and arts, and

conveniences of life, all that is laudable or valuable in the world."[169] Whereas Hobbes thought there could be no arts, letters, or society in the absence of an absolute sovereign, Bentley contended that there could be no arts, letters, or society without religion. "No community ever was or can be begun or maintained, but upon the basis of religion," Bentley declared. The transition from barbarism to civilization is "entirely owing to the power of religion," which gives people hope and comfort, meaning and purpose, standards of behavior and a sense of direction.[170]

Without religion, Clement Ellis (1633–1700) noted in *The Folly of Atheism*, men would destroy themselves by "lasciviousness, intemperance, and luxury . . . devouring and ruining one another by malice, envy, pride, covetousness, and oppression."[171] And this is the thrust of the political argument against atheism. Belief is not private, because it has public effects. Atheism, by promoting deviancy, produces decline and lawlessness, at which point a strong man must necessarily arise to restore order. The intolerance of atheists, from this perspective, is not intended to restrain freedom, but to protect it. Freedom requires mastery of the passions, which religion promotes, and protection from the tyrant, whose rise becomes inevitable in an irreligious, dissolute nation. A free political order, then, must be founded on religion.

Bayle referred to this line of thought as a "false prejudice" based on the erroneous belief that "the lights of conscience" are "the rule of our actions." This false prejudice, however, can be corrected by true philosophy, that is, "a proper examination of the true springs that make us act."[172] All of the main authors featured in this chapter searched for these true springs and principles of human action. And they all reached the conclusion that Hobbes did, namely, that "the passions of man" are "the beginning of all his voluntary motions."[173] Since passions, not beliefs, guide human behavior, Bayle could argue that "atheism does not necessarily lead to moral corruption."[174] Beliefs simply do not matter that much. In the *Dictionary*, Bayle pointed to the ancient Epicurean garden as an example of a society of atheists, who "deny providence, and lay their supreme good in their own satisfaction." Yet these Epicurean atheists were not necessarily "traytors, cheats, poisoners, thieves, &c."[175]

Based on the universal principles of human nature that Bayle specified, he concluded that wherever crimes are severely punished, and honor and infamy are attached to certain things, individuals entirely lacking be-

lief in "a first creator and keeper of the world" will be moral and civil. Solely by protecting their reputations and furthering their interests in trade, for example, atheists will be inclined to "assist the poor . . . oppose injustice . . . be faithful to friends . . . give up the pleasures of the body . . . do no ill to anyone."[176] And all this without religion.

It is no surprise that contemporaries read Bayle as an atheist.[177] Aside from vouching for the superiority of a society of atheists over a society of Christians, Bayle often made a stronger case for atheism than for theism in his *Dictionary*.[178] In the *Continuation of the Various Thoughts* (1704), moreover, Bayle echoed Hobbes's claim that nature abides by immutable laws and that "everything happens by a fatal and inevitable necessity," thereby leaving no room for miracles or particular providence.[179]

Bayle's brazen presentation of Epicurus's argument from evil in the *Dictionary* served as a model for both Mandeville's and Hume's own critiques of divine providence. Bayle stated that, among the ancients, it was Epicurus who famously "deprived [divinity] of the Government of the World, and did not acknowledge it to be the cause of this universe."[180] In his *Dictionary* entry on Epicurus, Bayle wrote that God, who did not make a world free from disorder, must have foreseen the evils that plague the world: "If he has foreseen them, it cannot be said that he made the world out of a principle of goodness." Indeed, in the entry "Paulicians," Bayle described God as a mother who "having permitted her daughters to attend a ball, would not revoke that permission on finding out that they would lose their virginity there."[181]

According to the Epicurean account, if God has made a "pernicious machine," then God is far from perfect. Based on our own experience of the faults of nature, there is no reason to attribute the moral attributes of perfection or benevolence to God. Bayle remarked: "He designed to build a magnificent palace for the accommodation of animated creatures, which were to come out of the shapeless bosom of matter, and there to bestow felicity upon them; but it happened that those creatures did but eat one another, being incapable to continue alive, if the flesh of some did not serve as food to others . . . prey to envy, jealousy, fraud, avarice, cruelty, diseases, cold, heat, hunger, &c. . . . Can their author, I say, be looked upon as a happy being?"[182] Human experience, as a result, testifies against the existence of an all-powerful, benevolent God. On the basis of human reason, alone, then, one lacks warrant to speak of God as providential, benevolent, or morally perfect.

Reason and revelation, from Bayle's perspective, point in different directions. Natural human reason testifies to blind nature that is at best indifferent to human affairs. And as Bayle acknowledged, this position extinguishes devotion in the heart of man.[183] Revelation testifies to a providential God. But this profession of faith requires a flight from reason. Thus, Bayle, like Hobbes, professed that natural reason, apart from revelation, leads to atheism.[184]

The recurring choice that appears throughout Bayle's writings is that between philosophy, which is based on common notions, and the gospel, which requires belief in incomprehensible mysteries. The two are irreconcilable. Yet each individual must choose one as a guide for decision and action. When this dichotomy arose, Bayle routinely opted for faith.[185]

Were Bayle's professions of faith sincere?[186] On this question, Gianluca Mori suggests that we let Bayle's text speak for itself.[187] This strategy makes the question of Bayle's actual belief less relevant. What is relevant is the fact that Bayle made faith and reason inhabit entirely different realms, so that Athens and Jerusalem no longer touched one another. Hobbes had sought to correct the early Church's decision to combine Greek metaphysics and Christian theology. By doing something similar Bayle spoke the same language as libertine atheists, who regarded belief in Christianity as irrational. In fact, when defending himself against the accusation made by the Wallon Consistory in Holland that he undermined Christian dogma, Bayle quoted the libertine Saint-Évremond's claim that, because reason and religion are contrary to one another, one must choose between them.[188] In this sense, the skeptical fideist, Bayle, arrived at the same conclusion as the libertine atheist, Saint-Évremond: faith is irrational.[189] And he argued that philosophy, not theology, should be sovereign in public life. As a theorist of toleration and pluralism, he advocated for the strict separation of politics and religion, requiring a completely secularized public sphere.[190]

## THE MAN-DEVIL'S BARGAIN: PRIVATE VICE, PUBLIC BENEFITS

Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) was a Dutch philosopher, doctor, and famous satirist who resided in England. A disciple of Bayle, under whom he studied in Rotterdam, Mandeville gained notoriety with *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1714), a lengthy commentary on

his satirical poem, *The Grumbling Hive*.[191] The *Fable*, which reverberated through the Enlightenment—provoking responses from luminaries such as Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and Rousseau—took direct aim at the neo-Stoic account of providence and natural sociability.

Mandeville's unyielding distinction between philosophy and revelation enabled this frontal assault. Mandeville adhered to the principle that philosophy "ought never to be mix'd with theology."[192] Like Hobbes and Bayle, Mandeville contended that the light of reason, alone, leads to atheism, not to the theism endorsed by scripture.

Leaving revelation aside and considering experience alone, Mandeville announced that "it is ridiculous to think, that the universe was made for our sake." Men, women, and children, for example, are helpless against a pack of wolves, for which reason they invent weapons. They are helpless against pestilence and disease, for which reason they invent medicine. Humans invent society for similar reasons, in response to these kinds of threats to human welfare, so that they might escape unease and attain "carnal" felicity. And, as seems evident from this narrative, "religion has nothing to do with it." Hurricanes and earthquakes unexpectedly destroy villages and resources. Wolves feed on lambs, fish feed on each other, birds and spiders consume flies. Everything that exists is potentially food or sustenance for some other creature. All of nature, Mandeville lamented, is "a frightful chaos of evil," in which "all the elements are our enemies."[193] "A thousand mischiefs . . . surround" us, Mandeville exclaimed, and "every thing is evil, which art and experience have not taught us to turn into a blessing."[194] Humanity's only hope, then, is to turn threats into advantages by means of human artifice.

Since there is no providential order governing man in his natural state, there is no natural law, no justice, no moral code to which human beings are obliged to adhere. Nature, so antagonistic to man, should be conquered, not imitated.[195] Neo-Stoics, particularly Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), whose writings were Mandeville's main target, believed that human beings could locate the "*pulchrum* & *honestum*" (the beautiful and the good) and govern themselves accordingly.[196] Shaftesbury described "virtue and vice" as "permanent realities," "the same in all countries and all ages," capable of being discovered by "sound understanding." These Stoic ideas are certainly dignifying. They elevate human nature. "What a pity it is," Mandeville declared, "that they are not true."[197]

Hutcheson, one of Shaftesbury's chief defenders, countered the claims of the "selfish" moralists—Hobbes and Mandeville—by arguing that "man is made for society . . . born with a kind affection to the whole . . . [and] a propensity to seek the welfare of it."[198] Human beings, on Hutcheson's account, do not form society for the sake of private advantage, or glory.[199] Mandeville considered this position "inconsistent with our daily experience."[200] Mandeville's moral anatomy, his search into the "organs and springs," the "small trifling films and little pipes" that "continue the motion of our machine," led him to reject the idea that human beings are naturally sociable and to subscribe to Epicurus's dictum that the human person acts for no other reason "but to please himself."[201] His continual self-seeking, his striving for delights, constitutes a kind of perpetual motion that produces constant conflict with other men in the state of nature.

Religious belief, meanwhile, neither restrains these passions nor lessens the conflicts that arise from them. Mandeville claimed that no matter how many people are schooled in the precepts of Christianity, learning about honesty, humility, and benevolence, they will not necessarily act on their Christian belief, or understanding. "If men were sway'd in their actions by the principles they side with, and the opinion they profess themselves to be of," Mandeville argued, "all atheists would be devils, and superstitious men saints: But this is not true; there are atheists of good morals, and great villains superstitious."[202] Mandeville hid behind the façade of faith by arguing that it is only unregenerate, that is, non-Christians, unassisted by divine grace, who by nature pursue their own satisfaction. But Mandeville never hesitated to accuse clerics, too—presumably the foremost beneficiaries of divine grace—of acting for selfish rather than selfless or pious reasons.[203]

In *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (1720), Mandeville admitted to making "great use of Monseiur Baile, without mentioning him" and borrowing "the same [evidences] as are in the Dictionary."[204] He employed the Baylean principle that human beings are led by passion rather than belief, or, in other words, that "man is so unaccountable a creature as to act most commonly against his principle."[205] He used this principle to explain the behavior of clerics, who sow discord with their unceasing theological debates, which produce "inveterate factions in every government."

Christian ministers are not exempt from the permanent, universal feature of human nature, "the love of dominion . . . that usurping temper

all mankind are born with."[206] Mandeville remarked that "pride and ambition are so riveted in our nature that there is no profession, nor no set of men [including clergy], but what would lord it and tyrannize over all the rest if they could."[207] For Mandeville, though Protestants and Catholics appear to be "govern'd by the spirit of Christianity," they are, underneath "their specious pretences," ultimately "over-rul'd by human passion" and intent on promoting "their own personal greatness, and temporal advantage."[208] Mandeville saw the same motive for power underlying priestly activity for the bulk of Christian history, writing that Protestant clergy, no less than Roman clergy, have exhibited the same "fondness for power and dominion" over both the laity and the civil government.[209]

Mandeville, who also assumed that priests were hypocrites, adopted the maxim "that most [priests] are wholly taken up with worldly cares, and mind themselves, their ease, their pleasure, and earthly comforts more, ten to one, than the cause of God or religion."[210] Given that priests "labour for their own worldly ends," Mandeville asserted that "we ought to be very cautious how and where to believe them."[211]

Since priests are more interested in dominion than in truth, they will never reach agreement about doctrine. They will continually vie with one another for supremacy, changing their doctrines at whim to suit their desire for power. They will protect the "temporal interests of their church," becoming "the greatest persecutors" until they conquer opposing sects.[212] Mandeville argued that for the sake of peace, sects "should not dispute concerning the truth of the doctrines; for disputes rather create new wars than appease the old ones." Instead, the divines "should even take an oath, that they will submit to the sentence that the political judges shall pronounce."[213] All clergymen and religious teachers, so accustomed to keeping others in awe of divine power, should themselves be "kept in awe" of temporal power. Mandeville submitted that all sects should be tolerated so long "as [they] shall own the government to be the supream authority upon earth, both in church and state."[214]

The English divines that Mandeville attacked were the same figures who had published lively confutations of atheism in the late seventeenth century based on the assumption that speculative and practical atheism caused moral laxity and political decline. In response, Mandeville, the most infamous social theorist since Hobbes, turned the tables on them, by demonstrating that antiatheist polemic itself was responsible for moral

turbulence, for splintering England into countless competing factions. It was Mandeville's charge, in the words of Kenneth Sheppard, that "neither speculative atheists nor libertines disturbed the public peace as much as the heated rhetoric of religious apologists."[215] The obvious solution to this problem was to cleanse the public square of disruptive theological debates. This solution—shared by Hobbes and Bayle—demanded that philosophy be crowned sovereign in public life and that religious rhetoric be barred from public political discourse.

The classical Christian view of morals and politics called for moral rehabilitation. Its proposed path toward political concord required that individuals adhere to the law of reason, or nature, and turn from moral corruption toward virtue. Mandeville's new science of politics, based on the presupposition that human beings are desirous animals, rather than rational and political animals, demanded only the development of institutions capable of channeling private "vices"—greed, avarice, and ambition—toward public benefits.

Mandeville's story in the first volume of *The Fable of the Bees* is a tale of how human beings became civilized, or social, that is, capable of living in society.[216] According to Mandeville, devious lawmakers invented the concept of virtue as self-denial to advance their own interests, to protect their own power, while keeping the people in check. Those supposedly heroic lawgivers of the classical republican tradition—Solon of Athens, Lycurgus of Sparta—founded regimes not for the public good, but for their own good. Similarly, cunning individuals discovered the power of belief in invisible powers "to aw and amuse a rude and unthinking multitude."[217] This fear of the invisible realm thrives among the poor and ignorant.[218] "Designing priests," exploiting this fact, foisted religious thought and practice on the masses. They "invented those lies, and made fables for their own advantage."[219] The lesson here is that all virtue-talk (of humility, of self-sacrifice) is bunk and all God-talk (of the incorporeal God, of the afterlife) is bunk.

Volume 2 of *The Fable of the Bees* is less satirical, more philosophical.[220] In this volume, Mandeville adopted a more scientific and empirical perspective on the history of society. Still dismissing the myth of the original lawmaker, which he pilloried in the first volume, Mandeville presented a conjectural history of the development of society in a series of dialogues between Cleomenes, Mandeville's representative, and Horatio, Shaftesbury's representative.[221]

Mandeville's method of investigation remained consistent in both volumes of the *Fable*. Mandeville maintained that "the same unbiass'd method of searching after truth and enquiring into the nature of man and society, made use of in [volume 1], is continued in this."[222] Mandeville's methodology is thoroughly empirical, based on what "experience teaches" us.

Experience teaches that the human being is moved by desire, particularly the desire for pleasure, which is what human beings call "good." The desire at the root of society is predominantly selfish rather than selfless. Mandeville repeated throughout the *Fable* that human beings, like all animals, are solicitous only of pleasing themselves. "Every body," Mandeville assumed, "endeavours to get what he wants with as much ease as he can."[223] In fact, Mandeville supposed that the personal pursuit of pleasure is a constant feature of the moral universe. "Action is so confin'd," Mandeville declared, that "we are always forc'd to do what we please."[224] In Mandeville's conjectural history of the development of society, according to which human beings begin as presocial savages driven by passion rather than reason, he assented to Epicurus's claims that each person is led by his own pleasure (*trahit sua quemque voluptas*) and that humanity's natural state is one of conflict and misery.[225] Since there is no natural "love of man for his species," society itself is the product of each person's "perpetual desire of meliorating his condition," which means that society, which developed by a lengthy process of trial and error, is "entirely built upon the variety of our wants."[226]

Though Mandeville did not base his political theory on anything like Hobbes's rationalistic contractarianism, he elaborated on the transition from savagery to civilization, an enterprise that Hobbes placed at the core of the new political science.[227] Like Hobbes's narrative of this transition, Mandeville's is devoid not only of republican themes, for example, heroic lawgivers and civic virtue, but also of Christian themes, for example, the idea of creation, fall, and redemption.[228] A prominent feature of the *Fable*'s second volume, in fact, is the apparent incompatibility between the Epicurean account and the biblical account of humanity's social history.[229] Mandeville distinguished Christian theological anthropology, which he considered a matter of faith, from his own Epicurean philosophical anthropology, which he considered a matter of natural reason.[230] In both volumes of the *Fable*, Mandeville defended his approach to morals and society by arguing that he is only referring to "mere fallen

man," not the redeemed or sanctified man. "It is impossible," Mandeville declared, "that man, mere fallen man, should act with any other view but to please himself."[231] It is only fallen man, though, that is knowable by natural reason. And it is fallen man that is the object of Mandeville's theory. This fallen man, however, has no hope of redemption or conversion. His social terrain is morally barren, spiritually dry.

Mandeville defended his approach to human social history by emphasizing what, from an empirical perspective, is certain, and by using as his primary reference point what, on the basis of natural reason, is undeniable. Neither one of the participants in Mandeville's dialogue agrees on the existence of the golden age. But both Cleomenes and Horatio agree on this: that there are savages. "But that there are savages," Cleomenes asserts, "is certain: most nations of Europe have met with wild men and women in several parts of the world, that were ignorant of the use of letters, and among whom they could observe no rule or government."[232] Whereas the existence and nature of Adam, of Eden, and the golden age is easily disputed, the existence and nature of the savage is altogether obvious. Cleomenes repeats this claim later in the dialogue, because, from an empirical standpoint, it is where political science must begin: "That there are wild beasts, and that there are savage men, is certain." This, as far as Mandeville can determine, is fact, and because "all our knowledge comes *a posteriori*, it is imprudent to reason otherwise than from facts."[233] Mandeville, reasoning merely on the basis of humanity's movement from savagery to civilization, argued that naturally unsocial human beings can be made social over time by means of useful social and political conventions.

In the aftermath of the discovery of the new world, religious wars in England and France, rapid industrialization, and unprecedented wealth creation, this Epicurean view on human nature and society—among all the Greek, Roman, and Christian perspectives still prevalent in modern England—seemed, to Mandeville, to be alone in finding empirical confirmation. Aside from these developments, the practical political situation of Great Britain seemed to require a new way of thinking about politics. Mandeville's writings exhilarated (or infuriated) readers at the onset of Hanoverian rule (George I, 1715), which marked the beginning of the era of Whig Supremacy (1715–60). Country Whigs and Tories—vocal opponents of the Court Whigs in power—repeatedly accused the regime of Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), the first prime minister of Great Britain

(1721–42), of corruption. Mandeville's writings constituted a defense of the alleged "corruption" of the Court Whigs.[234]

Walpole's alleged corruption lay in his friendships with King George I (1660–1727; r. 1714–27) and King George II (1683–1760; r. 1727–60). He relied on royal patronage to secure Court Whigs with government positions—in the army, church, or civil service, for example. This, according to the Country Whigs, made Parliament dependent on the Crown and expanded the number of government offices. The Walpole regime also prioritized the monied interest over landed and trading interests. In the 1690s, after the Glorious Revolution (1688–89), King William III (1650–1702; r. 1689–1702) oversaw the creation of the Bank of England and the national debt.[235] The rapid increase in national debt fueled Great Britain's war apparatus. Whereas Country Whigs interpreted these developments as detrimental to civic virtue, since they incentivized spending over thrift and the funding of a professional army rather than a citizen militia, Mandeville offered a robust defense of this modern form of governance.[236]

According to Mandeville, modern demands for national defense required far more than the citizen militias praised by civic republicans. Modern nations needed standing armies and a bustling economy to fund those armies. Furthermore, a private ethos of self-denial seemed counterproductive to the ends of economic expansion and national greatness.

Mandeville incisively exposed what he construed as the hypocrisy of moralists in the Christian and civic humanist traditions. His moral psychology highlighted the hypocrisy of the middling ranks of men, that is, members of the *beau monde*, and, particularly, members of the Societies for the Reformation of Morals, created in England in the 1690s to counteract public vice.[237] The presentment of the Middlesex grand jury in 1723 recommended the suppression of *The Fable of the Bees* on account of its denial of divine providence, its "libertinism," "blasphemy," "profanity," its defense of vice, and its assault on virtue, all of which tended toward the propagation of infidelity, the "corruption of all morals," and the subversion of government.[238] This language reflected that of the Societies for the Reformation of Morals and the concerns of Country Whigs.[239]

According to Mandeville, such advocates of self-denial and civic virtue paradoxically indulged in a market society that contradicted the very same values they professed to hold. These proponents of Christian self-denial,

for example, treated luxuries, including silks, sugars, and spices, the latest fashions, and the most decorated apparel, as essential elements of daily life. Their habits of consumption flowed from an ethos of self-indulgence, not regard for the public good. Yet this, for Mandeville, was *the* ethos of commercial society. "To be at once well-bred and sincere," he said, "is no less than a contradiction; and therefore while man advances in knowledge and his manners are polish'd, we must expect to see at the same time his desires enlarg'd, his appetites refin'd, and his vices increas'd."[240] He defended the practices of a large commercial nation against advocates of Christian self-denial and sought to give a more truthful account of human society in light of the demands of modernity.

Mandeville stated, "Religion is one thing and Trade is another."[241] Trade, when sustained by the scheme of justice, works profitably on the passion of pride. Pride is "the tye of society," because it moves people to act. Pride is at the root of honor, that is, the desire for reputation.[242] And it is the desire for reputation that makes an individual seek socially acceptable means by which to better his condition. Selfishness might be the ethos of commercial society. But instead of leading to corruption, it produces great economic gains and it is conducive to peace in polite society.

Whereas Hobbes had been consumed with the question of political obligation, Mandeville contemplated the questions that would occupy eighteenth-century philosophers after him: What is the origin and end of political society? How does society form? And what is it for? Hobbes and Mandeville agreed that human beings, naturally antisocial, must be made social. But whereas Hobbes thought they were made tractable by an absolute sovereign, Mandeville noticed they were made tractable by commerce and industry. This was a theme that Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume would pick up.

Mandeville, then, helped to vindicate the age of luxury by drawing on an ancient Epicurean account of human motivation and the development of society. Mandeville, who referred to his own philosophical position as Gassendist, argued that human beings are machines governed by "various passions."[243] Humans, like other animals, naturally find themselves in "the wild state of nature," where, because they follow their inclinations, they inevitably come into deathly conflict with others unless they are, by means of some innovation, "made sociable."[244] And Hume, in his own conjectural history, confirmed that it is commerce and trade, not religion, that makes men social.

## HUME'S NARRATIVE OF SOCIETY'S ADVANCEMENT IN THE "NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION"

Hume-Epicurus announced in EHU section 11 that the denial of divine providence does not threaten moral virtue or social stability. But Hume needed to prove this. Having no recourse to revealed and natural religion, he could no longer situate his moral and political thought within the Christian framework of creation, fall, and redemption. Nor did he express any willingness to retain the classical republican conception of political society, according to which founding lawmakers civilize human beings by framing good laws that help men to flourish through the discipline of the passions and the promotion of social cooperation. Mandeville had taken a wrecking ball to this account in *The Fable of the Bees*. To describe how society can prosper without belief in God, providence, and the afterlife, Hume developed a new narrative to ground a new political science. And his narrative incorporated the themes present in the writings of Hobbes, Bayle, and Mandeville, who similarly sought to detach politics from religion and to reimagine society's origins and ends.

One of the main themes of the "Natural History of Religion," aside from the origin of religion, of course, is the general trend of "the improvement of human society, from rude beginnings to a state of greater perfection" (NHR 1.1, 135), that is, from rudeness and barbarity to learning and politeness (NHR 1.3, 135). For the sake of illustration, one might say that, just as huts precede palaces and agriculture precedes geometry, "the mind gradually rises from inferior to superior" (NHR 1.5, 136).

In the "Natural History of Religion," Hume provided a conjectural account of this improvement of society. A conjectural history is one that describes prehistorical development, or one that fills in the gaps of the historical record with conjectures based on the principles of human nature. Hume's science of man, in which he laid out the principles of the mind, informed all his historical narratives, whether about the progress of the arts, religion, politics, or economics. All Hume's historical writing was philosophical, confirming and exemplifying his science of man.[245] For this reason, the line demarcating conjectural history from theoretical and real history in his writing is hard to fix.[246]

Hume's theory of the development of religion informed his theory of the origins and ends of society. Depicting "human life . . . before the institution of order and good government," he envisioned no paradise, only a

"barbarous" age characterized by polytheism and "superstition" (NHR 3.3, 142). His narrative conflicted with the biblical account in which Adam's monotheism is the first form of religion.[247] And he insisted that, in the beginning, there was not a rational being—an original Adam—as portrayed in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's account, Adam, from the very first, stood "Godlike erect, with native honor clad," made in the image of his "glorious Maker" and formed for "contemplation . . . and valor."[248] On the contrary, Hume painted early man "on the first origin of society" as "a barbarous, necessitous animal." "Pressed by . . . numerous wants and passions," early man's first response to nature was not an awe-filled expression of wonder, curiosity, and inquiry, but an anguished display of "trembling, and sacrificing, and praying" (NHR 1.6, 136). These early humans were concerned primarily with survival. They were drawn to religious belief by ignorance and passion. They did not cognize the supreme Deity the way rational theists did in eighteenth-century Great Britain.[249]

Nevertheless, Hume suggested that all religion, whether in its more primitive polytheistic form or its more sublime monotheistic form, is reducible to "human hopes and fears, wishes and apprehensions" (NHR 8.1, 159). But the invocation of invisible deities, to which human beings are impelled by self-love, fear, and hope for a better future, does not make them happy. Human beings submit themselves to divine powers with control over nature to free themselves from nature's arbitrariness. But they remain subject to arbitrariness, only this time in the form of divine capriciousness. The unremitting, unpredictable chaos to which even the most superstitious human being remains subject proves either that the gods are impotent or that they are maliciously playful, acting in man's favor one moment and to his detriment the next. Thus, according to Hume, the only principle that can be drawn from man's religious experience is this: "To-day [God] protects; To-morrow [God] abandons us" (NHR 2.3, 139). "Terror," he maintained, "is the primary principle of religion, it is the passion which always predominates in it, and admits but of short intervals of pleasure" (DNR 12.29, 128). Indeed, the primary passions experienced by religious individuals are "diffidence, terror, and melancholy" (NHR 3.4, 143).[250] Even clerics admit as much when they preach that affliction brings one closer to God than temporal success (NHR 3.5–6, 143–44).

Divine worship, in which humans selfishly engage to improve their lot in life, causes men and women to obsess over their own righteousness,

their own prospects for eternal bliss. And they become willing to sacrifice anything—family, friends, or moral standards—to achieve salvation. "Hence," Hume professed, "the greatest crimes have been found, in many instances, compatible with a superstitious piety and devotion" (NHR 14.6–7, 181–82). Echoes of Bayle abound in these sections in which Hume described the prevalence of the passions. Human beings, according to Hume, reliably act according to predictable motives, namely, self-love, gratitude, resentment, ambition, envy, and avarice. The influence of religion, on the other hand, is "wavering and uncertain" (NHR 12.15, 172). Yet he wrote as if he were certain of one thing, that Christians do not conduct themselves according to the doctrines they profess: "Hear the verbal protestations of all men: Nothing so certain as their religious tenets. Examine their lives: You will scarcely think that they repose the smallest confidence in them" (NHR 15.7, 184).

Whereas Christian doctrine is creedal and philosophical, the polytheistic religion that preceded it was traditional and poetical, rooted in stories passed onto succeeding generations. Hume gave two reasons for why he thought "a *traditional*, *mythological* religion" was "more reasonable" than "a *systematical*, *scholastic*" one (NHR 12.26). First, both types of religion are theoretically flawed, based as they are on ignorance and credulity, but pagan polytheism at least promoted superior virtues, such as courage and virility, rather than the self-abnegating, monkish virtues of Christian theism (NHR 10.2, 164). With the victory of Christianity in Rome, the ancient pantheon of dragon-slaying, sword-wielding, city-building heroes was replaced by self-flagellating, praying, fasting founders of monasteries and religious orders. Dominic replaced Hercules. Benedict replaced Romulus. Francis replaced Hector (NHR 10.3, 164). These were bad trades, according to Hume. Channeling Machiavelli, Hume condemned these heroes and their associated virtues for making people fit for "slavery and subjection" (NHR 10.5, 164).

Hume explained his preference for polytheism over monotheism with a second reason. Besides denigrating "all popular theology, especially the scholastic," for its "appetite for absurdity and contradiction," he upbraided all monotheistic faiths, but especially Christianity, for its exclusivity, its demand for orthodoxy (NHR 11.3, 166). Whereas Hume praised the "tolerating spirit of idolators," he deplored the intolerance of monotheists (NHR 9.3, 162). Polytheism, unlike monotheism, was a "social" religion

(NHR 9.5, 162). Monotheism, on the contrary, proved dogmatical and persecutorial (NHR 12.16–18, 172–73). The negative social effects of various sects endeavoring to convert one another to true religion were obvious for Hume.[251] When several monotheistic religions vie for supremacy in a society, "the several sects fall naturally into animosity, and mutually discharge on each other that sacred zeal and rancor, the most furious and implacable of all human passions" (NHR 9.1, 161).

Religion—monotheistic religion, in particular—aggravates the original passions, making them more unwieldy and more socially devastating. Religion, then, as a social convention designed to meliorate humanity's destructive passions, fails in its task. In Hume's narrative, the laws of justice constitute the second—and much more successful—attempt to meliorate humanity's natural, destructive, and ineradicable passions of pride, greed, and ambition. The institutions of justice and government, which promote trade, thereby replace the institution of religion as the glue binding society.[252]

In Hume's narrative, prosperity appears as a challenger to religion, as an antidote for the ills fostered by it. Whereas religion perpetuates a melancholic and gloomy disposition, prosperity generates alacrity and satisfaction, resulting in a degree of terrestrial happiness that makes human beings forget about God. Prosperity, moreover, incentivizes industry and civility, which, for Hume, are virtues leading to advancements in the arts and sciences. He stated that "prosperity . . . begets cheerfulness and activity and alacrity and a lively enjoyment of every social and sensual pleasure: And during this state of mind, men have little leisure or inclination to think of the unknown invisible regions." Consequently, he proposed as a general rule that "times of prosperity, make them forgetful of a divine providence" (NHR 3.5, 143). In periods of great wealth, religiosity is unlikely to thrive. When human beings are living comfortably, they are prone to relax their religious observances. This decline in pious attachment to God is beneficial for both peace and virtue. Only by force might individuals maintain pious attachment to God. Citing the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, Hume asserted that human beings in order to be made religious need to be chastised "into a reverence for the gods, whom, in a continued course of prosperity, they are apt to neglect and forget" (NHR 3.5, 144).

The pursuit of prosperity, the chasing after wealth and power through trade, depends on the same selfish passions that religion does. As a result, "self-love," "pride," and "vanity" need not be condemned for having nega-

tive social effects (EPM App. 4.3n66). They can be peacefully and effectively channeled to the public good. Self-love, then, should be conceived simply as a morally neutral motivation, since it is basic to human life. It is the most original and predictable of all human motivations. It cannot be excised. Although Hume tried to distance himself from the "selfish" theorists of morals in his second *Enquiry*, he echoed Hobbes on the permanent, and morally neutral, status of self-love. Hobbes had based his entire political science on the idea that human beings by "necessity of nature . . . desire *bonum sibi*, that which is good for themselves, and . . . avoid that which is harmful."[253] Mandeville also conceived of this desire to promote one's own welfare as stable and universal and, thus, capable of serving as the first principle of political science. "Every individual is a little world by itself," Mandeville argued, "and all creatures, as far as their understanding and abilities will let them, endeavor to make that self happy: This in all of them is the continual labour, and seems to be the whole design of life."[254]

What is it, then, that makes individuals happy, virtuous, and cooperative socially? Hume contended that it is not religion, but the institutions of justice and government that do so. The superstitious individual's efforts to appease God result in neither happiness, nor virtue, nor social peace. The Christian, moreover, who engages in burdensome acts, such as fasting or other "distinguished marks of devotion," is too engrossed in his own process of sanctification to devote himself to worldly affairs, to acts of justice. Justice, according to Hume, does not require belief in a deity. Religion and trade are two entirely different things, just as Mandeville had suggested. An individual will be inclined to act virtuously—to repay a loan, for instance—solely for the sake of advantage, even "were there no god in the universe" (NHR 14.6, 181).

Thus there are two choices when conceptualizing human affairs. One can either follow "natural reason" or yield to "ghostly guidance and direction" (NHR 14.8, 183). Hume opted for the former, portraying religion as theoretically suspect, morally damaging, and politically harmful. This set the stage for Hume's political conventionalism, in which human beings combine to create justice, law, and government to further their own advantage. But Hume took the social contract theory with which Epicureanism was associated and naturalized it, so that it became not just a theory but a reflection of who we are as human beings, how we live, and how we realize our potential in society. It became, in other words, a new founding myth to shape societal self-understanding.

PART 2

# Liberalism's Founding Myth

THREE

# Hume, Epicureanism, and the Contractarian Vision

Hume reduced politics to a science. In so doing, he appropriated the modern Epicurean idiom.[1] The Epicurean idiom, however, is distinguished not only by despiritualizing empiricism, the concern of part 1 of this book, but also by the social contract,[2] which is the concern of part 2. And Hume is famous for his objections to social contract theory.[3] In fact, if college students read anything by Hume in their politics courses, they are likely to read his rejection of Lockean-style contractarianism in the essay "Of the Original Contract."

Locke asserted that individuals are obligated to obey the law because they promise to do so. Hume, on the other hand, argued that individuals obey political authority because it is useful to do so. As Hume stated in his memorable example in the second *Enquiry*, "two men pull the oars of a boat by common convention for common interest, without any promise or contract" (EPM App. 3.8). People cooperate in society in a similar manner. They agree to obey the laws of justice and the magistrates who enforce them, but their agreement is unspoken. It is expressed in action. And it is rooted in a shared understanding of mutual interest.

Sir Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), the author of *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), noticed that Hume, in spite of his criticisms, still worked within the imaginative universe of the social contract. Hume took Locke's narrative of the origins of society and smoothed out its rough edges, applying "modern methods of enquiry" to make it more natural, more gradual, more evolutionary. As Stephen saw it, Hume argued in the *Treatise* that law and government "take their origin in the gradual development of society, which is not, as earlier writers had supposed, based upon a contract, but which gradually generates a common understanding which may be compared to a contract."[4] Stephen observed, moreover, that Hume's social philosophy, like Locke's, remained individualistic, reducing society "to a mass of atoms."[5] If this is true, then the alleged distance between Humean and Lockean liberalism is narrower than often is supposed.

When describing the nature of convention, Hume accepted that it "proceeds from the voluntary choice, consent, or combination of mankind." He only denied that the notion of "promise" has anything to do with the obligation to obey (EPM App. 3.7).[6] This is the thrust of his critique of the Lockean "original contract." Hume was undoubtedly innovative in his treatment of consent, but he did not operate in an entirely new idiom of political theory, one that was, as one scholar recently suggested, "without precedent."[7]

Hume's innovations are properly interpreted as contributions to, rather than refutations of, contractarian modes of political thought.[8] Hume's naturalization of the social contract represents a crucial development in the history of modern Epicureanism and its conventionalist approach to justice and society.[9] Part 1 of this book explained the modern Epicurean critique of religion; part 2 will begin by establishing the chief characteristics of Epicurean political theory in comparison to its chief rival, ancient and modern Stoicism.

## CLASSICAL STOIC AND EPICUREAN POLITICAL THEORY

The Epicurean approach to political theory depends on a particular moral anthropology. This moral anthropology determines how we judge the legitimacy of law and government. The Epicurean approach to nature, human nature, and society might best be expressed by the words that

Plutarch (46–119) attributed to the ancient Epicurean Colotes: "Those who have established laws and ordinances and instituted monarchies and other governments in towns and cities, have placed human life in great repose and security and delivered it from many troubles; and if any one should go about to take this away, we should lead the life of savage beasts, and should be every one ready to eat up one another as we meet."[10] Plutarch, an untiring second-century critic of Epicurean philosophy, rebuked Colotes for his assertion that, without law and government, "we should lead the life of savage beasts." To the contrary, Plutarch wrote, men would still be equipped with the moral law, which is prescribed by man's essence as a rational being and which obligates men even in the absence of human law and government. This moral law, according to Plutarch, is ascertainable by reason and evident in the ideas of the great philosophers, Socrates and Plato, for example. There is no reason to think that men will become beasts without government: "For if any one, taking away the laws, should leave us nevertheless the doctrines of Parmenides, Socrates, Plato, and Heraclitus, we should be far from mutually devouring one another and leading the life of beasts. For we should fear dishonest things and should for honesty alone venerate justice, the Gods, our superiors, and magistrates. . . . And doing that willingly by reason, as Xenocrates says, which we now do by force and through fear of the law."[11]

Aristotle seemed to give voice to what would later become the Epicurean position when he indicated that without law and government, human beings are indeed inclined to be ruthless. "For just as man is the best of the animals when completed," Aristotle claimed, "when separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all." "Justice," moreover, according to Aristotle, is "a thing belonging to the city."[12] Based on these remarks it would seem that Aristotle anticipated the Epicurean claim that justice separates the prepolitical condition from the political condition. Aristotle contended that human beings in the former are brute savages, while human beings in the latter are civilized. In this case, it would seem altogether proper, from both an Epicurean and Aristotelian standpoint, to judge the legitimacy of social and political institutions *horizontally*, based on whether they properly advance human beings beyond a primitive condition to a more pleasant civilized condition.

This *horizontal* approach to judging the legitimacy of law and government belongs to an Epicurean framework. Epicurus defined justice as "a

pledge of reciprocal usefulness, [that is,] neither to harm one another nor be harmed." For this reason, Epicurus observed, "justice was not a thing in its own right, but [exists] in mutual dealings in whatever places there [is] a pact about neither harming one another nor being harmed."[13] As Lucretius explained in his didactic poem *De rerum natura*, these social pacts are constitutive of justice. They form first for the mutual protection of human beings from the dangers of wild animals, and second for the mutual protection of human beings from the dangers posed by each other. And these social pacts make social progress possible. The conventions of justice and government distinguish civilized society from primitive society.

From the perspective of classical Socratic political philosophy, however, which is represented by the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic schools, various regime types are judged not by their *utility* in advancing humanity's social condition but by their accordance to reason. Aristotle, for example, who declared that "man is by nature a political animal," did not incorporate any kind of movement from a prepolitical condition to a political condition into his analysis of which regime is best. Aristotle argued that "it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and the other things of this sort; and community in these things is what makes a household and a city."[14] Human beings, according to Aristotle, are born under government. Rule is natural, just as political society is natural. Human beings are born with the tools with which to judge the political institutions under which they live. Their reasoning about what is good and what is bad for human beings, what is noble and ignoble, just and unjust—based on a consideration of universal human nature—enables them to judge between good and bad regimes without reference to any kind of origin story outlining a narrative of progress. In other words, the way we judge good and bad systems of governance is analogous to the way we judge good and bad human actions, not with reference to progress, but by locating the *honestum*, that which is noble, or good, in itself. The *honestum* takes first place and determines what is truly useful and pleasant for human beings.[15]

Classical Socratic political philosophy is unlike Epicurean political theory insofar as it takes as its starting point the idea that human beings are rational animals living in political community.[16] Classical Socratic thought seeks to distinguish between good and bad regime types—such as, for example, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, and democracy—based

on their tendency to promote what Cicero, following Aristotle, called "a happy and honorable life."[17] Cicero presented his Stoic natural law theory in opposition to the utilitarian theory of the state presented by the Epicureans. Cicero challenged the Epicurean narrative of society's origins in book 5 of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, dedicating the entire third book of *De re publica* to arguing that justice is not conventional, but universal and eternal. The natural law, which is not of human creation, serves as the bond between human beings in society, constituting a "community of interest" oriented toward the development of natural human capacities, including our inclinations toward knowledge, society, and virtue.[18]

In *De legibus*, Cicero defined law as "the highest reason, rooted in nature, which commands things that must be done and prohibits the opposite."[19] Justice, for Cicero, is natural, not artificial. Justice is defined not by utility, but by the highest law, which is representative of right reason and which predates any written human law. In fact, the highest law stands in judgment over human law. "There is only one justice," Cicero declared, "which constitutes the bond among humans, and which was established by the one law, which is right reason in commands and prohibitions."[20] "In fact," Cicero continued, "we can divide good laws from bad by no other standard than that of nature."[21]

Even before individuals joined political community at some historical moment (whenever that happened to be), they already lived in a community of reasoning animals, a community under a law that, though unwritten, was perceived by all and acted upon by all, as evidenced by each individual's pursuit of good and avoidance of evil. The origin of justice, then, is not to be found at the origin of society, but in the law of reason. According to Cicero, "law is a power of nature, it is the mind and reason of the prudent man, it distinguishes justice and injustice."[22] The natural law is evident every time we judge human actions to be better or worse in the pursuit of good and avoidance of evil. When we give voice to such judgments, we testify to some rule and measure of action that we consider to be sharable by and accessible to all human beings by virtue of our rational nature, which constitutes our shared humanity. Judgments of this sort are expressions of *common human reason*.

The natural law, for Cicero, provided the link between *pronoia* (providence) and *logos* (word, reason).[23] Stoic political philosophy is teleological, as is all Socratic political thought, in that it directs human beings toward

their natural end, that to which they are providentially led, which is life according to reason, or *logos*. According to classical political philosophy, reason perfects human nature because it is what is best in human nature. And virtue, according to Cicero, "is reason brought to completion, which certainly exists in nature."[24] The *honestum*, then, exists in nature. And virtue "is nothing else than nature perfected and taken to its highest level."[25] Classical Socratic political philosophy is, in this sense, oriented upward and outward, toward a divine, or providential, expression of *logos*, or universal reason, that provides an independent standard of judgment not only for human action but also for the structures by which human beings are governed. Epicureanism, on the other hand, defines justice without reference to metaphysical dogmas concerning the providential governance of the universe. This Epicurean position makes it possible to rest ideas of justice and political legitimacy on "consent," "opinion," "acquiescence," or "agreement," as is done in the contractarian-conventionalist tradition of political theorizing, which Hume advanced.

## MODERN STOIC AND EPICUREAN VARIETIES

Epicurus's treatment of religion served as the highest classical expression of the critique of religion.[26] Similarly, Epicurus's empirical approach to justice is the highest classical expression of a utility-centered political conventionalism. The Epicurean critique of providential teleology and Epicurean political conventionalism go together.[27] The latter follows from the former. And this is evident in Hume's modern Epicurean critique of Hutcheson's neo-Stoicism.

When Hume announced in the voice of Epicurus in section 11 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that the denial of a divine existence and a divine providence did not threaten the foundations of society, he made clear his opposition to the neo-Stoicism of Hutcheson, who based his entire system of morals and politics on the idea that benevolence is the end goal of the providential governance of the universe, and the standard by which to judge human morals. The sense of justice, in this case, is natural. It is innate, instilled by God. From Hume's modern Epicurean perspective, on the other hand, justice is artificial, founded upon opinion, or agreement. And this is characteristic of the contractarian vision, which is a form of political conventionalism.

Hutcheson, a modern moral sense theorist, had a deeply teleological perspective on morals. He equated "calm emotion" with rational desire and "violent emotion" with sensual desire.[28] The calm passions, according to Hutcheson, consist of benevolent affections, or "kindly feelings of our hearts," oriented toward "the happiness of all men without distinction."[29] Hutcheson described these calm passions as divine gifts, or divine powers, in a manner similar to the intellectual faculty in the Aristotelian tradition.[30] These calm passions are placed in our minds by God for our own happiness, "so that we may discover and learn for ourselves . . . real good and evil . . . the measure of true good and evil," which is to say that which is good by nature, the *honestum*.[31] Hutcheson claimed that "by our reason and reflection, we may see what was the intention of God the Author of our Nature in this whole fabric of our affections; that he plainly intended the universal happiness, and that of each individual, as far as it is consistent with it; and that this intention should be our rule: that we should therefore restrain and control, not only all selfish affections, but even all generous particular affections, within such bounds as the universal interest requires."[32]

Hutcheson adopted the view that he ascribed to Socrates and Cicero, "that a sense of what is decent (*decorum*) and honorable (*honestum*) is natural to man; it is this sense which prompts us to esteem everything that is kindly, faithful, gentle, friendly; it is also the reason why we love men endowed with these virtues with a particularly intense love and goodwill."[33] The highest possible pleasure, according to Hutcheson, is that which accords with the providential orientation toward benevolence, which "consists in kind affections to our fellow-creatures, gratitude and love to the deity, submission to his will, and trust in his providence with a course of suitable actions."[34] This is classical language, blended with that of the Christian tradition.

The Epicurean system, on the other hand, elevates the useful and the agreeable over the noble, or good. Hume exemplified this position when he theorized that "the distinction of vice and virtue arises from the *four* principles of the *advantage* and of the *pleasure* of the *person himself*, and of *others*" (T 3.3.2.16). He argued that the virtues of justice and allegiance to government are founded primarily in the determination of *utility*, or mutual advantage. This is contractarian language. He expressed agreement with Mandeville's assertion, variants of which can be traced all the way back to Epicurus, that the pursuit of the *honestum* (the right) or the *pulchrum* (the beautiful), as a standard of judgment, is a "wild-goose chase."[35]

It was Epicurus who famously declared, in opposition to the Socratic philosophers, "I spit on the beautiful (*to kalon*) and those who pointlessly respect it when it produces no pleasure."[36] Hume similarly subordinated the *honestum* and *pulchrum*—in all matters of moral and aesthetic judgment—to utility. Hume's contractarian language, then, like Epicurus's, opposes the classical tradition of moral and political theorizing carried on by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Cicero, and Plutarch.

Utility in Epicurean thought is determined not by divine providence, but by each individual's declaration of what is or is not advantageous, or useful, to herself and her associates based on considerations of what is pleasant, or agreeable. Utility as defined within the Epicurean framework is an extension of an Epicurean approach to morals. Epicurus declared that "pleasure is . . . our starting point for every choice and avoidance and we come to this by judging every good by the criterion of feeling."[37] It is appropriate, from this standpoint, "to make all these decisions [regarding choice and avoidance] by comparative measurement and an examination of the advantages and disadvantages."[38] Both on an individual and social level, then, actions are judged primarily with reference to pleasure and utility. This is why Epicurus defined justice as "not a thing in its own right," but "something useful for mutual associations."[39]

In a letter to Hutcheson, Hume noted that he was following Horace, "one of the best moralists of antiquity," when he considered justice to be a factitious virtue founded on utility, rather than on "final causes," which Hume viewed as "pretty uncertain and unphilosophical." Quoting Horace, Hume declared that *utilitas justi prope mater et aequi* ("utility is the mother of justice and equity") (L 1:32–33). By making utility the standard of justice, Hume associated himself with Epicurus and Horace. Mill would later trace a direct line from Epicurus to Horace and from Hume to Bentham, thereby characterizing these thinkers as representatives of one unified tradition of thought, which is distinguishable by its equation of justice with utility.[40] Simon Somerville Laurie (1829–1909), who was secretary to the education committee of the Church of Scotland, described Hume's ethics as "an eclectic Epicureanism." And according to Laurie, though Bentham "repudiated" Hume's moral sentimentalism, "he unquestionably owed to him the form of his own utilitarianism."[41]

Each of these thinkers—Epicurus, Hume, Mill, Bentham—supposed that reason operates instrumentally. "Sober calculation," as Epicurus said,

is required for the attainment of virtue and happiness, neither of which is chosen for its own sake, but "because of pleasure."[42] Hume, too, declared that virtue's "sole purpose" is to make her votaries "cheerful and happy; nor does she ever willingly part with any pleasure." "The sole trouble, which [virtue] demands," Hume continued, "is that of just calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness" (EPM 9.15). Bentham would later define utility, quite simply, as "the property of producing pleasure or preventing pain."[43] Hume, who argued that "usefulness is agreeable," and who equated the agreeable with the pleasant, would surely agree that utility is defined in terms of pleasure.[44]

Thomas Reid (1710–96) described the Epicureans as "the only [ancient] sect who denied that there is any such thing as *honestum*, or moral worth, distinct from pleasure." "In this," Reid contended, "Mr. Hume's system agrees with theirs." The notion of utility must have reference to some further end. And utility in the Epicurean system refers to the end of pleasure. As a result, in both systems, that is, the Epicurean and the Humean, "pleasure is the only end, the only thing that is good in itself, and desirable for its own sake; and virtue derives all its merit from its tendency to produce pleasure."[45]

## HUME'S APPROPRIATION OF MODERN EPICUREANISM

Hume never called himself an Epicurean. But he did call himself a mitigated, or Academic, skeptic. Hume, as a mitigated skeptic, attempted to hold his opinions without dogmatism and to confine his investigations to what he could discover empirically, by means of experience and observation, in common life. Still, his skeptical resistance to the application of a priori principles to empirical investigation was inextricably linked with a modern Epicurean perspective on morals. Skepticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was used as a cudgel with which to beat the Scholastic Aristotelianism prevalent in European universities. Skepticism was a negative tool, a tool of deconstruction, which in many cases made way for a positive Epicurean moral philosophy. Gassendi, for example, after issuing skeptical attacks on Aristotelianism, mitigated his skepticism, eventually developing what Richard Popkin called a "tentative Epicureanism." Gassendi's empirical epistemology presaged the "scientific outlook" that

would receive robust expression in the tradition of British empiricism, especially in the thought of Hume.[46] Hume's skepticism not only served as a guard against dogmatism and vulgar superstition, but also set the stage for a thoroughgoing empiricism. And it is in this sense that "the spirit of scepticism" pervades Hume's empirical "science of man," as Ryu Susato has aptly noted.[47]

Hume's science of man, in fact, built upon the Gassendist principle that the difference between human beings and animals is merely a matter of degree. By placing man and beast on the same plane, a modern Epicurean moral anthropology enabled philosophers to take reason, formerly conceived as the divine part of human nature, and submit it to the passions, the same kinds of passions exhibited by the beasts. This moral anthropology supported a contractarian political viewpoint. From the contractarian perspective, the point of political life is the pursuit of material advantage as ascertained by reason exercised only instrumentally, in service to each person's respective desire for individual betterment. From the classical perspective, on the other hand, the point of political life is the pursuit of the common good as ascertained by right reason, acting over and above passion. Rational, political beings, as Aristotle portrayed them, pursue the good together. Passionate and desirous beings, as Epicurus portrayed them, pursue pleasure together. And whatever the scheme of action makes pleasure attainable they call *useful*.

Samuel Sorbière (1615–70) had called Hobbes a new Epicurus for affirming "that man differed by next to nothing from brute animals."[48] Hobbes, for example, argued that "the imagination that is raised in man (or any other creature endued with faculty of imagining) . . . is that we generally call understanding; and is common to man and beast."[49] Bayle had defended what he described as the Epicurean view that there is "only more or less difference" between "men and beasts."[50] Mandeville, too, eschewed the Cartesian view and adopted the Gassendist position that human beings, like beasts, are feeling *autonoma*.[51] For Mandeville, human beings are not essentially rational or moral beings. They are, instead, as mortal and material as the beasts. By lowering human beings to the level of beasts and treating them as feeling creatures whose movements are governed by passion, Mandeville expressed what F. B. Kaye called "the core of the modern scientific, empirical attitude."[52] This was also a distinctively Epicurean view. Julien Offray de La Mettrie, one of the most radical French

Enlightenment thinkers, author of *Machine Man* (1747) and *The System of Epicurus* (1750), attempted to explain the workings of human nature with reference to universal physical laws alone: "From animals to man there is no abrupt transition, as true philosophers will agree."[53]

One of the central aims of Hume's *Treatise*, according to Norman Kemp Smith, was to prove precisely this point, that "the determining influence in human, as in other forms of animal life, is feeling, not reason."[54] Arguing that animals employ their reason just as humans do—that is, instrumentally—and that animals feel the same passions that humans do, Hume concluded that "no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men" (T 1.3.16.1).[55] Hume restated this position in the first *Enquiry*: "The experimental reasoning itself, which we possess in common with beasts, and on which the whole conduct of life depends, is nothing but a species of instinct or mechanical power, that acts in us unknown to ourselves" (EHU 9.6).

Philosophical materialists often equated human and animal understanding, portraying both as the result of internal movements determined by physical laws. In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Philo adopted a similar position, claiming that there is no essential difference in "springs and principles" that move human bodies in comparison with those that move "vegetables and animal bodies" (DNR 4.8, 63). And in the essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which went unpublished during his lifetime, Hume disputed the alleged nobility of human reason, by reasoning in the following manner: "Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, tho' in a more imperfect manner than man. Are their souls also immaterial and immortal?" (E-IS 592).

In his writings, Hume routinely denied the priority of mind over matter. In the *Dialogues*, Philo tentatively approved of a materialist philosophy of mind, or at least used its terminology, by hypothesizing that even human reason can be reduced to a "little agitation of the brain which we call thought" (DNR 2.20, 50). Philo theorized that the "machinery of thought" is altered by external stimuli, such as the disposition of the body, weather, or food, all of which tend to "communicate to [the machinery of thought] very different movement and operations" (DNR 4.8, 63). Hume minimized the difference between mind and body in other writings. In "Of the Immortality of the Soul," he supposed that "every thing is in common between soul and body." He remarked that the "organs of the one are

all of them the organs of the other. The existence therefore of the one must be dependent on that of the other." As a result, the machinery of thought, as Hume called it, is by all appearances dependent on the "organs of thought and sensation" (E-IS 596).

Though Hume did not articulate a materialist ontology, he wielded his skepticism to undercut belief in the immateriality and immortality of the soul, which led him to agree with the materialists that "matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation" (T 1.4.5.33).[56] In the *Treatise*, he argued that philosophers who explain thought by means of an immaterial soul "reason too hastily." They abruptly pronounce that "'tis impossible motion can ever produce thought, or a different position of parts give rise to a different passion or reflection" (T 1.4.5.30). Since experience is "the only source of our judgments of this nature," Hume considered himself obliged to refute the idea of an immaterial soul, while attesting to the likelihood that mental phenomena are consequences of corporeal processes, even if they may not be identical to them. He refrained from speculating about the nature of material or immaterial substance, but he supposed that thought can be, and likely is, the product of motion, in accord with physical laws, in a manner we simply have not yet discovered. And he thought it perfectly befitting a skeptical philosopher to investigate the "cause" of thought—but not the nature of substance, because we have "no idea of a substance" (T 1.4.5.6)—as long as those speculations do not violate the limits of experience.

Hume favored the position of the freethinkers, contending that the language we use to analyze the physical world can be applied with ease to the analysis of human thought and perception, which is why he compared the human body to a machine, the organization of which lends itself to thought (EHU 8.14).[57] He collapsed the distinctions between mental and material, soul and body, human and animal. John Biro writes that Hume, in contemporary parlance, would be grouped among "physicalists," who argue that complex intelligent behavior is derived from "merely mechanical" processes "subject to the same laws as the rest of the natural world."[58] As Paul Russell has pointed out, the human person is, on Hume's account, endowed with no elevated place in the natural world, for the mind of man works mechanically and instinctually, as does the mind of an animal.[59] Hume's skepticism, then, just as Bayle's and Mandeville's before, conforms to the modern Epicurean portrayal of the human person "as just one more

kind of natural animal, rather than the semi-divine hybrid of the Graeco-Christian metaphysical tradition."[60]

George Anderson (1676–1757), an army chaplain who was at the forefront of efforts to excommunicate Hume, railed against Hume for precisely this reason.[61] Anderson asserted that the elevation of passion and the degradation of reason was the pivotal move made by "*Epicurus*, and his followers," including Hume and Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782), whom Anderson derisively called "Sopho." "*Epicurus*," Anderson wrote, "declined reason, and appealed to sensation as supreme judge of truth and falsity." Anderson thought a far superior moral anthropology could be found in the writings of Cicero and in the Bible. Quoting from Cicero's *De legibus*, Anderson described humans as "the illustrious offspring of the most high God," who share in reason and are "partners with [God] in reason." The same law of right reason applies in heaven and on earth. After citing Genesis 1:26–27, according to which man is made in the image of God, Anderson concluded that "it is evident, that Sopho and his assistant *David Hume* Esq; do decline reason as judge of truth and *right*; and consequently exclude that faculty of the human soul from the conduct and government of life."[62] This is the basic understanding of the human person at the center of Hume's science of man, from which springs his political conventionalism.

At the age of eighteen, Hume wrote to his physician, claiming to have suffered a mental crisis after having tried and failed to implement the rigorous Stoic morals recommended by Shaftesbury in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1726) (L 1:12–14).[63] After this episode, Hume turned away from the Shaftesbury/Hutcheson model and consulted the works of extreme skeptics and Epicureans, most notably Bayle and Mandeville. He collected materials for more than a decade in preparation for the *Treatise*, in which he refuted doctrines of the Stoics—whom Bayle denounced as "pious frauds"—and crafted what he considered to be a more certain theory of human nature, an alternative to Stoic and classical republican rigor.[64] When Hume returned to England from France, where he had written the *Treatise*, he stayed at the Rainbow Coffeehouse in London. And there, he befriended Pierre Desmaizeaux, Bayle's biographer and the translator of Bayle's works. Hume depended on Desmaizeaux for "instruction & advice," likely asking for feedback on the newly written *Treatise* (L 29). And Desmaizeaux, one of the first reviewers of the *Treatise*, revealed that Hume was the author of the anonymously published tome.[65]

Hume was familiar with the works of Bayle, who had affirmed that a peaceful society could result merely from the pursuit of mutual satisfaction. He insisted that Epicurus was right to say that "the happiness of man consists in being at his ease, and in having a sense of pleasure; or, in general, satisfaction of the mind."[66] And in his *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, Bayle pointed to the concord of Epicurus's garden to show that a society of virtuous atheists is possible. This Baylean assertion regarding the society of virtuous atheists was, in fact, a fundamentally Epicurean insight. Quoting from Gassendi's *De vita et moribus Epicuri*, Bayle remarked that the Epicureans bickered little about theoretical matters, while the followers of Socrates split into many different camps, for example, the Old and New Academies, the Peripatetics, and the Stoics. The "sect of Epicurus," though, "is like a well-modelled state, which secure from all sedition, is governed by one common consent and mutual concurrence."[67] Bayle thereby concluded that sociability should not be promoted by means of philosophical or theological dogma, but by means of the mutual pursuit of ease and convenience. This, for Bayle, seemed a viable means by which to promote toleration amid incessant, violent bickering over religious differences.

## HUME, EPICUREANISM, AND CONTRACTARIANISM

Hume built on Bayle's effort to establish the theoretical foundation for a society of virtuous atheists.[68] The rejection of providence, according to Hume, did not threaten the foundations of society. "Questions of public good, and the interest of the commonwealth," he argued, are entirely disconnected from "fruitless" speculative inquiries into the divine origin and government of the world (EHU 11.4, 11.9–10).

But a society of virtuous atheists, which is freed from metaphysical dogma, still needs grounding in what Bayle termed "one common consent and mutual concurrence." A political society that is not founded on providential teleology or metaphysical dogma requires some other agreed-upon standard of legitimation. And the source of legitimation for Bayle, who looked to the sect of Epicurus as a model, is "common consent and mutual concurrence," arrived at by reflective feeling, about what constitutes mutual satisfaction, or mutual advantage, for the individuals in the community. According to the contractarian imagination, which operates on an

Epicurean moral anthropology, justice and society depend not on speculative principles about nature and human nature, but on universal agreement regarding strictly temporal advancement.

If government is an artifice instituted to better the human condition, then government maintains its legitimacy insofar as it generates agreement among the people that it does in fact better their condition (T 3.2.9.1). In the *Treatise*, Hume provided a conjectural history of how the inventions of justice and government lifted human beings from a savage state to a civilized state. Hume's narrative of the origin of society served primarily to explain not political obligation, as Hobbes's and Locke's respective narratives did, but to describe the purposes of law and government, that is, to determine their legitimating functions. Hume defended the legitimacy of these institutions of law and government, in part, by raising the specter of life without them, that is to say, "that wretched and savage condition, which is commonly represented as the *state of nature*" (T 3.2.7.1). The "state of nature" for Hume was a useful fiction illustrating the miseries inherent in a life without justice and society. He argued that justice and government, which are the proper remedies for the deficiencies of the primitive condition of humankind, are derived not "from nature, but from *artifice*" (T 3.2.2.9). Hume, in accord with the Epicurean approach to political life, thought that private benevolence (or limited generosity) could sustain ties between acquaintances and relations, but that utility and consent were the tools by which people could be brought into large and lasting societies. And though Hume is rarely, if ever, cast as a theorist of consent, he too agrees that the inconveniences of humanity's natural state require a remedy. And the "remedy can only come," he admitted in a telling passage, "from the consent of men" (T 3.2.7.4).

Ryu Susato gives voice to the predominant view that Hume's challenge to the Whig myth of the ancient constitution constituted an attack on social contract theory as a whole.[69] It is true that Hume and Adam Smith objected to the Lockean theory of political obligation as expressed in the vulgar Whiggism of eighteenth-century Great Britain.[70] Hume sought to prove "that the obligation of submission to government is not derived from any promise of the subjects." He argued that there is no historical record of an original contract and that most government is founded upon force rather than consent. Even if "there were no such thing as a promise," Hume declared, "government wou'd be still necessary in all large and civiliz'd societies" (T 3.2.8.7).

Hume made this point most forcefully in book 3 of the *Treatise* and in his essay "Of the Original Contract." He wrote "Of the Original Contract" in the summer of 1747, two years after the failed Jacobite rebellion in Scotland (1745), an armed uprising of partisans of the House of Stuart. Writing against the original contract, that is, "the system of the Whigs," Hume emphasized that utility is the source of obligation (L 1:112). He admitted, though, that, given the fact of equality, the first government to ever have existed must have required the express consent of the people, who submitted themselves to some governing authority. "Nothing but their own consent, and their sense of the advantages resulting from peace and order" could have "caused them to submit to government" (E-OC 468).[71] Though there is no record of it, the establishment of the first government must have been produced by individuals, who, knowing that the laws of justice would be better maintained and enforced by civil magistrates, consented to the rule of governing authority. "This conclusion, however, when carry'd so far as to comprehend government in all its ages and situations," Hume remarked, "is entirely erroneous" (T 3.2.8.3). After all, allegiance to a particular government is not a matter of choice. People are born into obedience. It is for this reason, Hume argued, that allegiance in modern political society is not derived from "our consent or promise," but from custom and habit (T 3.2.8.9).

In "Of the Original Contract," Hume was more interested in the question of obligation than that of legitimacy. When he dealt with the question of consent in this essay, he pondered whether consent, or choice, might have any role to play in whether one is obligated to submit to the House of Stuart or the House of Hanover. Hume supposed that it is not the people's "consent [that] gives their prince a title." Instead, the people "willingly consent, because they think, that, from long possession, he has acquired a title, independent of their choice or inclination" (E-OC 475). In regard to political obligation, then, the opinion of interest is not the only consideration. One might have a duty to obey the law based on the opinion of right, that is, the ruler's title based on birth, antiquity, or present possession. The people acquiesce to the rule of a particular sovereign, "because they apprehend him to be already, by birth, their lawful sovereign." And Hume admitted that this kind of "tacit consent, which may now be inferred from their living under his dominion . . . is no more than what they formerly gave to the tyrant and usurper" (E-OC 478). Generally, one

might say that the interest of society grounds allegiance to government. But when the question arises about whether a particular sovereign has a right to rule, questions of long and present possession and positive law must be considered (E-OC 486).

Hume's focus on custom and habit, however, does not necessarily render him an anti-Hobbesian or anti-Lockean creator of a new idiom of political thought. John Rawls noted that there are two purposes of the social contract. One purpose is to yield a conception of legitimacy. The other purpose is to explain citizens' political obligations. In "Of the Original Contract," Hume criticized the view that the obligation to obey political authority, for example, a Stuart or Hanoverian monarch, is derived from a promise to do so. But Rawls rightly argued that Hume did not critique the contractarian view of legitimacy, according to which consent, or agreement, is required to legitimize social and political order.[72] If this view is correct, then Hume's political theory is aligned with the fundamental insight of the social contract tradition, which, according to Rawls, is this: "A legitimate political order rests on unanimous consent."[73] In Hume's account, a regime is legitimate insofar as people agree that it is mutually advantageous, or useful, to each person.

Social contract theory, at its most basic level, purports to explain what legitimizes the exercise of political coercion on free individuals. Hume's theory revealed that the promissorial relationship between ruler and subject is not the most essential feature of the contractarian mode of thought.[74] Jean Hampton argued correctly that it is only "*the promissorial relationship between ruler and subject in Lockean-like social contract theories to which* [*Hume*] *objects*."[75] According to Rawls, Hume's truncated contractarianism was essentially Lockeanism stripped of its superfluous—and historically unjustifiable—features. Rawls argued that "Hume maintains . . . that nothing is gained from basing political obligation on an original contract. Locke's doctrine represents, for Hume, an unnecessary shuffle: one might as well appeal directly to utility."[76] And Rawls acknowledged that "the kind of utilitarianism espoused by Hume . . . is not strictly speaking utilitarian," but contractarian.[77]

Hume did not take the Benthamite step of basing legitimacy on achievement of some collective hedonic calculus. Instead, he considered it imperative that "the whole scheme . . . of law and justice is advantageous to the society and to every individual" (T 3.3.1.12). For Hume, the legitimacy

of law and government is based on the agreement or assent of individuals who confirm, through suitable resolution and behavior, that conventional arrangements are mutually advantageous, furthering the interests of each individual and of society. Because of this emphasis on mutual advantage rather than the maximization of happiness, Hume's conventionalism bears more in common with the contractarian tradition than the utilitarian tradition.

## THE DETERMINATION OF UTILITY BY OPINION OF INTEREST

On Hume's account, law, justice, and government are legitimate only insofar as they achieve the purpose for which they were instituted: the advancement of public utility. But who is to judge whether conventions are mutually convenient and advantageous, improving the condition of each individual and of society? Expediency is surely determined by the opinion, or subjective approval, of each individual who is engaged in the cooperative endeavor on the condition that it furthers both private and public interest. Thomas Merrill has argued that "Hume subordinates legitimacy to utility."[78] But utility is not a stand-alone category. It depends on opinion. Opinion determines what is mutually advantageous, or, in other words, what is in the private and public interest. "Though men be much governed by interest," Hume wrote, "yet even interest itself, and all human affairs, are entirely governed by opinion" (E-BG 51).[79]

Consent to conventional arrangements is rooted in the opinion that these arrangements are mutually advantageous. Hume claimed that "as force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded" (E-FP 34). Hume added considerable nuance to this idea that conventions are imbued with authority by means of human opinion. When discussing political legitimacy in "Of the First Principles of Government," Hume countered the thesis made popular by James Harrington in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) that political power is determined by the distribution of property. According to Hume, it is opinion that causes the many, who have greater force on their side, to submit to the few, who possess political power. This opinion, though, consists of two types: the opinion of the people regarding public interest and the opinion of the people regarding the right of the governors to power and to property (E-FP 32–35).

Hume's argument that the voluntary convention of government is founded ultimately upon the opinion of the people had been espoused during the prior century. Sir William Temple, for example, another critic of the social contract theory of obligation as well as a defender of Epicurean morals, declared that the foundation of legitimate government is "the opinions and interests" of the people.[80] Hobbes had already expressed a similar idea when he wrote that "the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people."[81] Locke even anticipated that he would receive criticism for his attempt "to lay the foundation of government" in popular consent, what others might regard as "the unsteady opinion, and uncertain humour of the people."[82] These thinkers vary in their interpretation of the source of the obligation to obey political authority, but they shared an Epicurean moral anthropology and a belief that government is legitimized by the opinion of the people.[83]

As Catherine Wilson has argued, the central aspect of Epicurean conventionalism is the idea that law, justice, and government are mechanisms that rest on "social pacts," whether in the form of "explicit agreement" or "passive acquiescence" to useful forms of social cooperation.[84] In Hume's modern Epicurean political theory, even habit, a kind of acquiescence, is indicative of some form of agreement that justice, law, and government are useful, or mutually advantageous. As a result, Hume's innovations are properly interpreted as contributions to, rather than refutations of, Epicurean and contractarian modes of political thought.

## THE ROLE OF HABIT AND REFLECTION

This is not to downplay Hume's singular contributions to conventionalist accounts of social and political order. His theory is singular insofar as he declared that the convention of government, historically, arises from direct agreement by means of deliberate choice, while the present governing authority is obeyed by a kind of indirect agreement, through a kind of acquiescence or habit. But habitual obedience alone, much like antiquity alone, does not make governing authority legitimate. Hume's account of legitimacy is more stringent than it may seem at first glance.

It is unclear, on Hume's account, whether any governing authority that is obeyed out of habit is, by means of this acquiescence, rendered legitimate.

He did seem to indicate in "Of the First Principles of Government" that the fundamental principle that government is founded on opinion extends "to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular" (E-FP 32). It may appear, then, as if Hume took the conservative stance that despotic governments are as legitimate as free governments. But, he insisted, "opinion is of two kinds, to wit, opinion of INTEREST, and opinion of RIGHT" (E-FP 33). It is the opinion of interest—rather the opinion of the right to power or to property—that serves as the primary determinant of legitimacy, because it is the end for which justice and government were established. "By opinion of interest," Hume clarified, "I chiefly understand the sense of the general advantage which is reaped from government; together with the persuasion, that the particular government, which is established, is equally advantageous with any other that could easily be settled" (E-FP 33). A regime that does not contribute to public utility, no matter how ancient it is, loses its legitimacy. And although Hume argued in the *Treatise* that original contract, long possession, present possession, conquest, succession, and positive law give some title of authority, that is, some right to govern, he pointed out that "as government is a mere human invention for mutual advantage and security, it no longer imposes any obligation, either natural or moral, when once it ceases to have that tendency" (T 3.2.10.15–16). In the final analysis, as Hume acknowledged in "Of the Original Contract," "the consent of the people" is undoubtedly "one just foundation of government," and it is "surely the best and most sacred of any" (E-OC 474).[85] Without expedience, or utility, other more particular questions about obedience, whether one should obey on account of a sovereign's right to property or power, for example, are rendered nugatory.[86]

Furthermore, Hume seemed to indicate that the mere exercise of authority, like that of feudal lords, for example, even if it upheld some modicum of order, did not make a governing regime legitimate. Feudalism, by breeding domination in masters and servility in peasants, was insufficiently egalitarian and qualified as inhumane from Hume's perspective.[87] Surely, however, there was habitual obedience to feudal structures in the medieval period. The question of a regime's legitimacy, then, ultimately seems to be resolved not by habit—which is a descriptive account of why government is obeyed—but by reflection. Whereas habit explains, descriptively, why people submit to government, reflection carries more nor-

mative weight, since it leads to the consideration of whether a regime truly does advance the public interest more than alternatives.

Habit is not merely instinctual. Habit, on Hume's account, derives from reflection and is subject to change on the basis of reflection. Habit is, at its best, responsive to reflection. According to Hume, justice "tends to promote public utility and to support civil society." The sentiment of justice is "derived from our reflection on that tendency" rather than "a simple original instinct in the human breast" (EPM 3.39). No simple, original instinct, he theorized, could be responsible for our ideas about justice and government, property, inheritance, contract, kings, senates, chancellors and juries. Both the conventions of justice and of government, according to Hume, "arise merely from the necessities of human society" (EPM 3.43): "The convenience, or rather necessity, which leads to justice, is so universal, and every where points so much to the same rules, that the habit takes place in all societies; and it is not without some scrutiny, that we are able to ascertain its true origin. The matter, however, is not so obscure, but that, even in common life, we have, every moment, recourse to the principle of public utility, and ask, *What must become of the world, if such practices prevail? How could society subsist under such disorders?*" (EPM 3.47).

Hume remarked that "it is reflection only" that makes us sacrifice the yearning for "unlimited freedom" or "dominion over others" to "the interests of peace and public order" (E-OC 480). We sacrifice these strong passions to public interest because, upon reflection, we recognize the dangers posed to society by disobedience. Habit, then, is a psychological mechanism that inclines us toward obedience, that gives the present political order the benefit of the doubt. In the first *Enquiry*, Hume had described habit, or custom, as that which inclines human beings to believe in the regularity of nature. The regularity of nature cannot be proven rationally. But by some natural instinct, or habit, we assume it. Inferential reasoning would have no basis otherwise. Just as Hume criticized philosophers who conceived of real power as something we could access out there, in nature, rather than in the imagination, he criticized Locke for thinking the original contract happens out there, in the world, rather than by an act of the imagination. For Hume, such agreement is hypothetical, a product of the imagination. It flows from reflection. But its starting point is habit. Rather than thinking of submission to political rule as an act grounded historically and externally in an original contract, he portrayed submission to

government as something unstated, but felt, grounded internally through habit and reflection. Hume's is a kind of psychological, rather than historical, contractarianism.

## THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF CONSENT IN HUME'S ACCOUNT

Consent, properly construed from the Humean perspective, consists in neither a written contract nor verbal affirmations nor the establishment of a sovereign, but in an *agreement* regarding the expediency of the conventions of law and government that finds expression through common behavior. When habitual, this agreement looks like acquiescence. When reflective, this agreement looks like hypothetical consent to the utility of social and political conventions. In either case, it is agreement that "produces a suitable resolution and behavior" among the parties that is "mutually express'd and is known" through action in common life. "And this," Hume contended, "may properly enough be call'd a *convention* or *agreement* betwixt us, tho' without the interposition of a promise" (T 3.2.2.10). Hume illustrated what he meant by "convention" by describing "two men, who pull the oars of a boat, [and] do it by an agreement or convention, though they have never given promises to each other" (T 3.2.2.10). "Every one," Hume averred, "expresses this sense to his fellows, along with the resolution he has taken of squaring his actions by it, on condition that others will do the same. . . . [T]his becomes an example to others. And thus, justice establishes itself by a kind of convention or agreement; that is, by a sense of interest, supposed to be common to all, and where every single act is performed in expectation that others are to perform the like" (T 3.2.2.22). In the *Treatise*, from which these passages are drawn, Hume treated justice as he tended to elsewhere in his oeuvre, in a confined manner, to refer only to the laws of property and contract. The violation of justice performed by one of our peers represents the violation of an agreement between human beings that is rooted in shared beliefs, or common understanding, about the efficacy—and universal scope—of justice. And this shared belief is expressed outwardly through obedience of the laws of justice and the enforcement of these laws by the government, which, Hume emphasizes, is essential in large modern societies (T 3.2.8.5).

Frederick Whelan has made the point that Hume differs from other contractarians by claiming that people consent to government because it

is legitimate, not that government is legitimate because people consent to it.[88] This formula, however, overlooks the import of a central element of Hume's argument, namely, that it is universal agreement to abide by the laws of justice and government that renders those laws advantageous. Hume wrote that "every single act [of justice] is perform'd in expectation that others are to perform the like. . . . 'Tis only upon the supposition, that others are to imitate my example, that I can be induc'd to embrace that virtue; since nothing but this combination can render justice advantageous, or afford me any motives to conform my self to its rules" (T 3.2.2.22). Unless everyone expresses their common understanding of the advantages of justice through cooperative behavior, justice is not useful. Justice is only useful when people agree that it is and act accordingly. Neither justice nor government would have a place if they were useless. And it is the agreement of the people to adhere to these conventions that *makes* them useful.

## THE RIGHT OF REBELLION

The modern Epicurean idiom is egalitarian and undergirds a right of rebellion.[89] And the right of rebellion is an element of the contractarian perspective that Hume scholars have located throughout his writings.[90] Hume, no friend of the Tory theory of passive obedience, sought to place the Whig right of rebellion on stronger empirical ground, or "more reasonable principles" (T 3.2.9.2). Hume, the empiricist, did not ground the right of rebellion in universal, a priori principles (see T 3.2.10.16).[91] Instead, he argued that rebellion can be justified in exceptional cases when it is evident that government, "a mere invention for mutual advantage and security," is widely acknowledged to have ceased contributing to these ends (T 3.2.10.16). When burdensome and oppressive governing authorities exist, it will be "so obvious and undisputed, as to remove all doubt, and overpower the restraint, however great, imposed by teaching the general doctrine of obedience" (HE 5:544). These calculations depend on "no other principle than interest," which is the reason government was created in the first place (T 3.2.9.4).

Even though it "is certainly impossible for the laws, or even for philosophy, to establish any particular rules, by which we may know when resistance is lawful," Hume declared, "it is certain that the people still retain

the right of resistance" (T 3.2.10.16; see also E-PO 492). It is a "general principle . . . authorized by common sense, and the practice of all ages." The people retain the right of rebellion when they judge that government, a mere invention for mutual advantage, does not redound to the benefit of each and every individual. Thus, there might be a duty to obey a present sovereign based on positive law, but the positive law is subordinated to the opinion of interest, that is, reflection on whether a regime is legitimate based on its contribution to public utility (L 2:261).[92]

## UTILITY AND THE PROMOTION OF HAPPINESS

Hume did sometimes present public utility in a minimalist manner as the maintenance of what Bernard Williams called the first questions of political society, that is to say, peace, order, and security. Hume wrote, for example, "It is evident, that, if government were totally useless, it never could have place, and that the sole foundation of the duty of allegiance is the *advantage*, which it procures to society, by preserving peace and order among mankind" (EPM 4.1). Elsewhere in the second *Enquiry*, though, Hume argued that it is not only the threat of disorder that causes us to praise the virtues of justice and allegiance, but also the promise of human happiness and perfection: "For what stronger foundation can be desired or conceived for any duty, than to observe, that human society, or even human nature could not subsist, without the establishment of it; and will still arrive at greater degrees of happiness and perfection, the more inviolable the regard is, which is paid to that duty?" (EPM 3.39).

The legitimacy of social and political institutions, for Hume, is judged not only by the preservation of order, but by the promotion of the kind of virtues supportive of human happiness and perfection. Happiness, on Hume's account, depends in large part on the peace of mind that virtue helps promote. Margaret Schabas and Carl Wennerlind note that Hume's political science is utilitarian to the extent that it is intended to promote human happiness.[93] But, as "The Sceptic," who is widely thought to represent Hume in the essays on happiness, contended, only "prejudiced reasoners" would try to impose one best way of life—one conception of virtue and happiness—upon others in political society. "The vast variety of inclina-

tions and pursuits among our species," according to "The Sceptic," means that "each man seems fully satisfied with his own course of life, and would esteem it the greatest unhappiness to be confined to that of his neighbor" (E-Sc 160). If the conventions of justice and government are intended to promote a safe framework for the pursuit of happiness, then, they must not impose one view of the good life on others. One reason that Hume defended modern commercial society is that, in his mind, it demanded neither the Roman civic virtue of the classical republic, nor the Stoic martial valor of feudalism, nor the Christian humility of the medieval world, but the industry of trade and manufactures, which sustained a kind of civil pluralism allowing each person to engage in the "just calculation" of pleasures and endeavors productive of peace of mind.[94] In such a condition, individuals can improve their respective conditions, carrying on their respective life plans, as they are temperamentally inclined to do so, according to their tastes and preferences. Such a condition provides grounds for the unanimous endorsement of such a regime.

Social rules are "useful and laudable," according to Hume, when they promote "ease" (EPM 4.13). And Hume declared that social rules, like social institutions, "are chiefly founded on mutual ease and convenience" (EPM 4.19). Mutual ease and convenience, moreover, are determined by reflective feeling, "a sympathetic movement of pleasure or uneasiness" that is excited by a "view of human happiness or misery" (EPM 5.23). Reflective, sympathetic feeling of this sort, which is grounded in the moral sentiment, results in common consent and mutual concurrence regarding the ends of public life and the efficacy of governing arrangements in attaining those ends. A mutually advantageous governing arrangement must in this case provide the solution to the two most significant ailments of prepolitical life, namely, economic scarcity and the moral impediments stemming from human partiality. It is the presence of these two ailments that caused human beings in the more natural or primitive condition—represented by the useful fiction of the state of nature—to consent to the conventions of justice and government on the basis of their utility. And it is reflective feeling, rooted in the *dulce* and the *utile*, that sustains these conventions. The Epicurean conceptual tools of pleasure and pain, utility and consent prove sufficient, for Hume, to explain the origin and development of an egalitarian social, political, and moral order that is absent in humanity's more primitive condition.

## CRITICAL RESPONSES TO HUME'S EPICUREAN POLITICAL THEORY

Two of Hume's contemporaries supplied strong counters to Hume's characterization of justice as an artificial, rather than natural, virtue. His portrayal of justice and allegiance to government as artificial virtues in the *Treatise* and subsequent writings was unquestionably a Hobbesian play, one that accorded with Epicurean conventionalism. Numerous writers rebuffed Hume's account of justice, including Lord Kames and Thomas Reid, whose arguments testify to the contractarian elements of Hume's political thought.

According to Lord Kames, who believed his friend Hume was "justly esteemed the greatest philosopher of his time," Hume, no less than Hobbes, founded justice on "agreement or convention." By distinguishing society, which is "established . . . by a sort of tacit convention, founded upon a notion of public interest," from a presocial and prepolitical state, Hume necessarily resorted to an idea of a "state of nature" in which there is no law of property. Lord Kames perceived as implicit within Hume's own theory the presence of a "state of nature" in which "there can be no such thing as property" and which persists until "justice is established by convention, securing every one in their own possessions."[95] Lord Kames rightly perceived here that a central element of contractarian thinking, the state of nature, is present in Hume's political theory, and persists until justice is created by agreement.[96]

Lord Kames provided an alternative to Hume's manner of thinking by reversing the order of cause and effect. Utility, according to Lord Kames, is not the cause of justice, but its effect. The sense of justice, the sense of right and wrong, is natural, and the sting of conscience is felt by anyone who commits a wrong, or is wronged, independent of convention or agreement. Lord Kames grounded property, specifically, in a hoarding appetite that assists reason and moves "us to provide against want." Since individuals need to procure drink, food, shelter, and countless other resources to survive, it is a natural instinct, possessed universally, whether by untutored children or wild savages, that inclines us to understand the concepts *yours* and *mine*.[97] Furthermore, Lord Kames asked, if pity, benevolence, friendship, and love are, as Hume maintained, natural affections that take society for granted, how is the natural affection that fits us for society—a sense of justice—alien to our native constitutions, so that society

itself must operate on the more narrowly constrained, individual affection of self-love?[98]

Hume had argued that it is the circumstances in which human beings are placed that compels them to create laws of property and trade, and courts of law. Those circumstances are limited generosity and moderate scarcity. Hume argued that if humans existed in a state of superfluity, they would hold all things in common. And if humans were morally upright as in the golden age, they would not need laws to help them to resolve controversies. But Lord Kames, responding to Hume's second *Enquiry*, posited that it was the very sense of justice that made the alleged golden age what it was. What, after all, could keep men and women morally upright if not a strong sense of right and wrong?[99]

In Lord Kames's understanding of justice, it is the natural sense of right and wrong that contributes to the judgment of a political regime's legitimacy. It is not simply the *utile*, but the *honestum* that serves as the standard by which to judge law and government. Rule in this case is not conventional, but natural, insofar as the law of morality possesses an authority that binds the conscience of man and that precedes any consent, or agreement. The *honestum* is not a human creation.

Thomas Reid observed that the artificiality of justice was "a favourite point in [Hume's] system of morals."[100] But as the reviewer of Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* observed in the *Critical Review* (October 1788), Hume's depiction of justice as an artificial virtue was an inevitable result of his adoption of the Epicurean system: "In Mr. Hume's improvement on the system of Epicurus, and his addition of the useful to the pleasurable, it was not easy to avoid making justice an artificial virtue, because our view of its morality must be derived from its ultimate tendency."[101] Reid thought that Hume's error lay in supposing a fundamental difference between man in his natural state and in his civilized state, so that a person in the former, for example, would have no reason or motive to return something borrowed, because he would not grasp the concept of justice, which is the creation of civilized man.[102]

When making the argument for justice as a natural virtue, though, Reid indicated that Hume theorized better than he knew. Reid pointed to specific instances in which Hume himself made assertions that took for granted the natural sense of virtue. For Reid, an individual, even in his natural state, once he has developed the use of reason, is capable of

distinguishing just from unjust without reference to the distant good of society's preservation. In a famous passage from the second *Enquiry* to which Reid referred, Hume acknowledged that a sensible knave, aware of an opportunity to break the law for his own advantage, without being caught and without bringing an end to society's scheme of cooperation, would have every motive to violate the law for his own advantage. Hume argued, though, that the only consideration that might prevent the sensible knave from pursuing this course of action was aversion to the uneasiness that would attend the act of injustice. But where might this uneasiness arise other than in a natural sense of justice's inherent baseness? If this sense of justice is as natural as Reid supposed and as Hume implicitly acknowledged, then Hume would have to give up his favorite claim that "justice is an artificial virtue, approved solely for its utility."[103]

Reid provided an additional argument, which is perhaps even more persuasive. When an individual reaches the age of reason, Reid contended, he, even in the natural state, would be able to distinguish between an injury and a favor. An individual would respond to a favor with gratitude and to an injury with resentment. An individual would respond to a favor with gratitude, because he would understand that he was given more than he was due. Similarly, an individual would respond to an injury with resentment, because he would understand that he was given less than his due, or had his due taken from him. Even in this natural state, then, an individual would have to understand what is due and what is not due. And this is the classical conception of justice, each being given his due, to which Reid subscribed, but which Hume regarded as vulgar. Even Hume, though, acknowledged that gratitude and resentment are original passions. If that is true, then humans know naturally what constitutes a favor and an injury. And as Reid concluded, "that which is neither a favour nor an injury is a just action."[104]

Reid opted for a more expansive definition of justice, one that included not only the potential to harm a person in his goods or property, but also the potential to harm a person in his family, liberty, and reputation. Surely, Reid supposed, Hume, who narrowly confined justice to property and contract, would not think it just even in the primitive state for an individual to "rob an innocent man of his life, of his children, of his liberty, or of his reputation." Such action would be deemed an injustice whether "in the most savage" or "in the most civilized tribes of man-

kind."[105] But in order for Hume to acknowledge this, he would have to separate himself from Hobbes and assert that justice is not artificial.

Reid, too, acknowledged that the "right of property is not innate, but acquired," because the earth, given to man in common, must be divided by men among themselves. Still, Reid maintained that property exists wherever men exist, since each person, even the most savage, must collect resources for daily subsistence. Survival requires it. And it is obviously an injury to rob a person, even the most savage, of his subsistence. "Thus it appears," Reid stated, "that some kind, or some degree, of property must exist wherever men exist, and that the right to such property is the necessary consequence of the natural right of men to life and liberty."[106] Even "in the state of nature," then, man may acquire property to provide the wants of his family and friends. He may protect himself against unjust invaders. And even without associating with a society other than his own family, he could justly be said to "have acquired property" and possess "distinct notions of . . . justice and injustice."[107]

Hume may have tried to avoid using the state of nature in his political theory, but by distinguishing so adamantly between natural man and civilized man and declaring justice an artificial virtue, he in effect depended on it. Reid responded that "property . . . may be acquired in the state of nature, and agreeably to the laws of nature; and that this right has not its origin from human laws, made for the public good, though, when men enter political society, it may and ought to be regulated by those laws."[108]

Hume thought promise-keeping, too, was a law of justice created by human beings for the sake of utility. But Reid argued that promise-keeping is the prerogative of man, one that distinguishes him from brute-animals and can be found "in every individual of the species, whether savage or civilized."[109] Promise-keeping, like property protections, are more properly grounded in trust and fidelity than utility. As Reid pointed out, the golden rule, a moral principle intuited in nearly every human culture, would be sufficient to sustain justice in the state of nature. And the golden rule requires no extended consideration of the scheme of cooperation necessary for mutual advantage. It follows, instead, from the dictates of conscience, the attempt to understand what is right and to abide by it, without consideration of an action's utility. Man, once he reaches the age of reason, possesses a conscience by which he ascertains right and wrong conduct, directing him toward the former. And this adherence to the law of conscience

permits faith and trust to develop among men, who associate with one another according to the law of right reason. "Without fidelity and trust," Reid wrote, "there can be no human society. . . . Without it man would be the most dissocial animal that God has made. His state would be in reality what Hobbes conceived the state of nature to be, a state of war of every man against every man; nor could this war ever terminate in peace."[110]

Hume, though, by declaring there is no sense of justice prior to the formation of law and political society, affirmed the position of the ancient Epicurean Colotes, who remarked that without the conventions of justice and government there is neither order nor morality, only levels of ruthlessness and licentiousness reminiscent of the primitive condition of humankind. That is because human beings, as Epicurus, Hobbes, and Gassendi agreed, are wolves to one another without the creation of suitable social and political conventions. Hume would certainly agree with this principle (EPM 4.3). The inconveniences of the state of nature, or, as Hume called it, the primitive condition of humankind, are not only economic, but also moral. The original condition that Hume described is characterized not only by moderate scarcity, but also by partiality (or limited generosity), a moral short-sightedness that is nearly as devastating to society as the most extreme selfishness. The institutions of justice and government prove mutually advantageous because they create space for a level of social and moral development impossible in humanity's primitive condition. That is why human beings agreed to these conventions in the first place, and why they still abide by them.

The only remedy to the economic and moral ills of humanity's primitive condition consists, for Hume, in universal consent to the useful artifices of justice and government. The obligation to obey law and government ultimately flows from reflection on, and consent to, the utility of these conventions, even though daily acts of allegiance to particular rulers, whose political authority derives from positive law, take the form of mere habitual conformity. There is a common consent and mutual concurrence—one might even say a moral consensus—regarding the purposes of law and government. These purposes determine when the exercise of political authority is legitimate. A political regime is considered legitimate in Hume's system, not when it is judged to promote what is right, or good, by nature, as ascertained by right reason, but when it is judged to promote what is useful, according to experience, as judged by feeling.

Unlike Hobbes, who asked what kind of contract people should establish in a state of nature, Hume asked how the existing social contract, which underlies all interaction in large and lasting societies, has evolved and how it is expressed through habit. Though Hume's naturalistic form of contractarian theory, with its focus on habit and custom, marks a transition in modern political thought from social contract theory to "social convention theory," it nevertheless constitutes, as critics such as Lord Kames and Reid acknowledged, a development of—not a departure from—that oldest form of utility-centric political thought, Epicureanism, the spring from which Hume's brand of contractarian-conventionalism flows.[111]

FOUR

# Philosophic Foundations for a Liberal Way of Life

Hume's conjectural history of the origin of justice in book 3 of the *Treatise* qualifies as what Annette Baier called an "instructive mythical history."[1] In this mythical history, Hume narrated how human beings, born in a necessitous and miserable state, are saved from their wretched condition by the convention of justice. Hume's narrative begins not with an original Adam in an original state of perfection but with the primitive savage in an uncultivated state. And his primitive savage stands in need not of divine grace but of the laws of justice, which move individuals from "inconveniencies" to "conveniencies" and from "incommodious" living to "commodious living" (T 3.2.2.5).

Unlike Gassendi, Hobbes, and Mandeville, Hume made no effort to situate his narrative within a postlapsarian time frame, corresponding to a biblical history in which fallen human beings, having been expelled from paradise, strive to build a city despite being afflicted by sin. Instead, he painted his social history as a comprehensive picture of human origins in which providential activity is conspicuously absent and humanity's passionate nature is rigid and unyielding. Baier, in fact, considered Hume's story of the origin of justice to be part of his "ongoing campaign to counter

the influence of the Bible" and called Hume's narrative a "point-for-point inversion of the biblical story."[2]

Hume's narrative of the origin of justice and society is central to liberal political theory. He presented with more clarity, sophistication, and empirical rigor the fundamental thrust of Hobbesian thought, which begins in a primitive, natural state in which human sociability, if not entirely lacking, is deficient enough to make the natural state—the savage state prior to the invention of justice—absolutely miserable.[3] Though Hume acknowledged that solitude is undesirable and that "every pleasure languishes when enjoyed apart from company" (T 2.2.5.15), he also argued that any sociability beyond family ties, that is, any sociability broad enough and strong enough to sustain large and lasting society, is not natural, but artificial. It is not given. It is created.

For Hume, there were no large societies, extending beyond small familial or tribal units, before the invention of justice. Similarly, according to Hume, humans lacked the psychological tools necessary to make impartial moral judgments before the invention of justice. Which means that, before the laws of justice were created by human beings, they did not have the capacity to judge impartially—that is, from the perspective of an impartial spectator—what is good or evil. They judged what is good to be that which benefited them. They judged what is evil to be that which harmed them. He argued that our societies and our moral systems were made by us, not for individual advantage, but for mutual advantage, to free us from the primitive state, in which individuals were neither fully social nor fully moral. Political science, from Hume's perspective, is tasked with locating and improving these man-made social and political institutions that are responsible for moving human beings from barbarism to civilization, or, stated in slightly different terms, all of which convey his meaning, from partiality to impartiality, from savagery to humanity, from warfare to peace.

Hume sketched an institutional formula by which to promote sociability and morals. And he defended the civilized, commercial regime in which he lived as that which best promotes the ends not only of material benefit, which moves human beings from a state of moderate scarcity to a state of plenty, but also of moral improvement, which helps individuals make impartial judgments and interact with one another according to the law of good manners.

Entrance into this kind of society—and the maintenance of it—requires a particular kind of moral training. As Hume explained in *Treatise* book 3, part 1, moral characters are judged by feeling, not by reason. The words "virtue" and "vice," like "good" and "evil," derive from the spectator's pleasant or painful response to a stimulus. The sight, or idea, of an action, which corresponds to a person's character, leads the spectator to describe a person as virtuous or vicious depending on the pleasure or pain the spectator feels at the sight, or idea, of it.

The moral feelings responsible for judgment, Hume argued, are trained best, not by philosophic education in the classical Socratic tradition or religious instruction in the tenets of Christianity. These traditions portrayed virtue as self-mastery, which occurs when reason controls and directs the passions. But he inverted this formula and placed passion above reason. Reason, for Hume, played little to no role in moral judgment. What is popularly called "reason," is, according to Hume, a "calm passion" that moves individuals to favor long-term benefit over short-term benefit, the kind of short-term benefit to which "violent passion"—such as the desire for vengeance—might drive us.

The "calm passions" are impartial. The best way to train the moral sentiment—a "calm passion," according to Hume—is by the subtle influence of social and political institutions that effectively manipulate the passions. As this chapter will explain, for the social and political institutions of commercial society to work, citizens must be willing to enter public life with an ambitious and avaricious desire to advance their standing in life. They must unleash the passions of ambition and avarice and allow the mechanisms of society to work on them, to convert these selfish aims into public benefits.

The institution of justice, on Hume's account, is key because it turns self-interest into sympathy for the public interest, that is, concern for the interest of all. In Hume's narrative, individuals do not need to master their passions for society to function, or even to flourish. Instead, they need to feed their passion for gain until they discover that their passion for gain is best satisfied by moderating it, in accordance with the rules of society, agreed upon by all, and enforced by government.

Hume's political science requires faith in these institutional mechanisms of human improvement. He alleged that these institutions make us moral and social, peaceful and prosperous, without the traditional burden

placed on the individual of governing the passions according to right reason. He replaced a classical Christian moral code centered on self-mastery and self-denial with an economic one, centered on industry and civility. His catalogue of virtues in both the *Treatise* and second *Enquiry* testify to this. Whereas the former moral system rested on a natural or religious teleology, wherein happiness and virtue consist of a movement toward the fulfillment of one's moral or spiritual capacities, the latter rests on an economic teleology, wherein happiness and virtue consist of participation in an economy that maximizes consumption and lifestyle choices.

It is not a stretch to say that the laws of justice play a salvific role in Hume's narrative of human progress. The religious fundamentals of the old Christian narrative are, in his writings, replaced by economic fundamentals, which he thought characterized the modern world. In book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume described the laws of justice as the rules that protect property, trade, and contracts. These rules, by making commerce possible, further the "interest of society." He contrasted these laws of justice with "baptism . . . communion . . . holy orders" and other "monstrous doctrines" upheld by Catholics and Anglicans, which are "mere priestly inventions" that "have no public interest in view" (T 3.2.5.14). The transfer of property by means of titles, which are legal representations, and the creation of obligations by means of a contract, which takes the form of verbal or written agreement, represent, for Hume, a "kind of superstitious practice in civil laws, and in the laws of nature, resembling the *Roman catholic* superstitions in religion" (T 3.2.4.2). He analogized these commercial beliefs and practices to religious ones. And he described the former as far more useful than the latter, insofar as they further "the convenience and advantage of society" (T 3.2.5.15).

Hume's theory that the conventions of justice and government miraculously transform the input of self-interest into the output of the public good can be analogized to faith, or superstition. But it is a rational faith that is vindicated by experience. This chapter will detail the robust philosophic framework that underlies Hume's faith in modern institutions. This chapter, moreover, will advance the thesis that he sought to spread this faith in his writings for the purpose of sustaining a liberal way of life. The meaning of his narrative of justice and society, most simply put, is this: One does not need to practice the philosopher's *rational government of the passions* or the religious believer's *self-denial* for society to flourish. In fact,

modern society might fare better if both these outmoded—and onerous—conceptions of virtue were discarded, since, as Hume endeavored to prove, they are unnecessary for national greatness and public happiness.

## THE HOBBESIAN FOUNDATIONS OF HUME'S MORAL SENTIMENTALISM

Philosophers in the early modern and modern periods debated whether moral distinctions were natural—grounded in the nature of things—or artificial—man-made. Hobbes had claimed that moral distinctions are not real, that is, they have no independent existence. According to Hobbes, all individuals are motivated by self-interest, and moral distinctions are established by the sovereign. Similarly, Mandeville had attributed the invention of the ideas of good and evil entirely to cunning politicians, who taught humility and obedience, for example, to maintain their power over the public.

Philosophers who critiqued the moral skepticism of Hobbes and Mandeville debated whether moral distinctions were made by reason or feeling, that is, sentiment. Moral realists of both varieties argued that moral distinctions are natural, rooted in objective reality, prior to the artifice of politicians. Samuel Clarke impressed upon his readers that moral distinctions are discovered by reason. Lord Shaftesbury contended that moral distinctions are discovered by feeling, or sentiment. Hume, like the sentimentalists, thought that moral distinctions arose not from the operation of reason, but from the operation of feeling. Hume, though, did not argue that there was an actual faculty—the moral sense—nor did he think that moral distinctions had independent existence, certainly not any independent existence grounded in benevolence, a communicable attribute of the Supreme Deity, as Hutcheson had supposed.[4]

Hume attempted to chart a middle course between the moral skeptics and the moral realists. For this reason, James McCosh (1811–94), in the *Scottish Philosophy* (1875), wrote about Hume: "Sometimes he seems to make man a selfish being [as did Hobbes and Mandeville]. . . . At times he seems to adhere to the theory of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, as to the existence of a moral sense."[5] But no one can serve two masters. One cannot balance realism and skepticism in his moral system. And Hume did not maintain that balance he tried to strike. Instead, his "moral sense" served as a pleasing, sugar-filled coating to cover the bitter interior of moral skepticism.

Hume undoubtedly sought to elaborate a moral system that could arrive at impartiality and objectivity, but not by the traditional means of, say, Hutcheson, who grounded morals in the benevolence of God. In Thomas Merrill's words, Hume's moral sentiment is "a passion that looks up to objectivity."[6] Similarly, Sharon Krause notes that Hume's moral sentiment is a feeling that, after appropriate reflection, "can support rather than thwart impartiality."[7] And Rachel Cohon argues that the moral theory of Hume's *Treatise* reveals how an individual who is primarily selfish can shift from judging persons according to the way they benefit her to judging others according to the way they benefit others, or society, at large. In other words, Hume, according to Cohon, articulated the path individuals must take to adopt the common point of view, the viewpoint of the impartial spectator. It is the impartial spectator's view that is appropriately called "moral," since it is appropriately "impartial." By adopting the "common point of view," as Hume termed it in the *Treatise*, he supposed that an individual can correct the errors caused by human partiality and produce an intelligible, shared, objective, and universal standard of judgment of vice and virtue.[8] In this way, the Humean moral sentiment seems to flout the skepticism of the selfish theorists, who claimed that individuals never really transcend the principle of self-love.

That is the interpretation of Hume the moral realist. But he appears to be less of a moral realist in light of his explanation of how selfish individuals, with partial views, become moral individuals, with impartial views. According to Hume, we "over-look our own interest in those general [moral] judgments" (T 3.3.1.17). But Hume, who dwelled on the pervasiveness of human selfishness in book 3 of the *Treatise*, admitted that "one may, perhaps, be surpriz'd, that amidst all these interests and pleasures, we shou'd forget our own" (T 3.3.1.30).[9] Having acknowledged the seeming intractability of human selfishness, he observed that human partiality cannot be remedied by "any inartificial principle of the human mind" (T 3.2.2.8). Nature, in other words, is not the solution. Artifice is. We make society. Society makes us moral. This portrayal seems to place Hume closer to the moral skeptics, who claimed that morals were man-made, than the moral realists, who sought guidance from nature.

Jacqueline Taylor has argued that Hume was unsuccessful, in the *Treatise*, in his effort to describe how selfish individuals transcend their partiality and make impartial moral judgments that are objective, shared, and universal.[10] According to Taylor, Hume realized that "the common

point of view" was an inadequate solution to the pervasive problem of partiality. As a result, Hume, in the second *Enquiry*, presented the feeling of humanity as the foundational element of moral judgment.[11] In other words, the feeling of humanity, a fellow-feeling of others, which interests us in the well-being of society, makes us forget our own interest when making moral judgments. The cultivation of this natural feeling of humanity through conversations in polite society is, as Taylor points out, altogether necessary if human beings are going to transcend their partial interests and arrive at proper moral judgments.

Taylor emphasizes that, for Hume, moral judgment is a social practice, and for this reason social structure matters. For Hume, "some forms of government and economy" are better than others at promoting the sentiment of humanity, which is the source of sound moral judgment.[12] Other forms of government and economy, meanwhile, have the power to thwart the sentiment of humanity. This seemingly modest insight—that sound moral judgment depends on sound political and economic institutions—contains some alarming implications for Hume's moral theory. It suggests that Humean moral assessment may depend as much on human artifice as it does on the allegedly natural feeling of humanity.

Conventions are central to Hume's account of moral assessment.[13] It is the refined member of society, after all—the one who is "accustomed" to law and government—who possesses the feeling of humanity, that is, the general "feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery" that is required for sound moral judgment (EPM 9.8n57; App. 1.3). And he treated this sentiment as something absent in humanity's ruder condition but present in modern society. The feeling of humanity, then, for Hume, is not so much natural as man-made.

The feeling of humanity, and with it, our ability to render impartial moral judgments, is largely produced by conventions, or general rules and systems of behavior, created on account of their utility. Social engineering is required to bring about recognition not only of what Hume called the *artificial virtues* (e.g., honesty, fidelity to promises, and respect of contracts), but also of what he called the *natural virtues* (e.g., courage, prudence, and generosity). The artificial virtues, as Hume described them in the *Treatise*, are those that depend on invention. Justice, for Hume, is artificial, because societies formed the rules of justice, without which there would be no concept of "justice." Allegiance to political authority, for

Hume, is artificial because societies formed governments, without which there would be no concept of "allegiance." The natural virtues, as Hume described them in the *Treatise*, do not rely on human invention. Generosity, for example, is natural, because one need not rely on social or political schemes of cooperation to show, or appreciate, this behavior.

But if moral, that is, impartial judgments, can only be made after the formation of social schemes of cooperation, then J. L. Mackie's contention that Humean virtues are all, in a sense, conventional is inescapable.[14] This interpretation, developed in this chapter, builds on depictions of Hume as a thoroughly modern theorist of commercial sociability, who regarded utility-advancing conventions as indispensable to the development of human society and moral distinctions.[15] Though Hume is sometimes presented as an "anti-Hobbesian" political theorist, one who is nearly Hutchesonian in his advocacy of natural sociability, it seems, based on this analysis, that Hume is no Hutchesonian naturalist, but a skeptic like Hobbes in many ways.[16]

Hume undoubtedly distanced himself from the selfish theorists of morals, Hobbes and Mandeville, who claimed that humans are only and always self-interested and that moral distinctions are entirely arbitrary and artificial. Hume dedicated an appendix of the second *Enquiry* to debunking the simplistic hypothesis of the selfish theorists—Epicurus, Horace, Hobbes, and Mandeville—that all benevolence is hypocrisy and all friendship is merely "a modification of self-love" (EPM App. 2.2). James A. Harris argues that Hume crafted the *Enquiries* as he did to evade any charge of radicalism, that is, to avoid the charge of Hobbesianism, so that "his moral philosophy would be judged on its own terms, and not dismissed as a reiteration of sceptical or licentious views from the past or present [as the *Treatise* was]. . . . Hume's hope, it may be supposed, was that no one would now confuse that agenda with the supposed licentiousness of Hobbes, Mandeville, and other modern moral sceptics."[17] This is perhaps why Taylor portrays the second *Enquiry* as a more philosophically satisfying response to the moral skeptics.

Hume's strategy, as Harris conveys it, was somewhat successful, as even Reid applauded Hume for refusing to admit in the second *Enquiry* that all motives are reducible to self-love. "In this respect," Reid maintained, "[Hume's] system is more liberal and disinterested than that of the Greek Philosopher [Epicurus]. According to Epicurus, virtue is whatever

is agreeable to ourselves. According to Mr. Hume, every quality of mind that is agreeable or useful to ourselves or to others."[18]

Still, Hume's contemporaries recognized a hint of Hobbesianism in his writings from the beginning. The only reviewer of book 3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, writing in *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*, took special notice of Hume's novel—and uneasy—combination of Hutcheson's moral sentimentalism and Hobbes's political conventionalism, or, in other words, his portrayal of justice as an artificial rather than natural virtue. Although Hume tried to find a middle way between the radicalism of Hobbes and the sentimentalism of Hutcheson, he ultimately built his moral and political system on the anatomizing vision of Hobbes and Mandeville.

For Hume, the science of man was supposed to promote "an exact knowledge of the parts," that is, the springs and principles of human nature, that, though "cold and unentertaining," assist the practical moralist in rendering his precepts more correct and his exhortations more persuasive (T 3.3.6.6). But as Hutcheson himself realized in his reading of book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume's work lacked "a certain warmth in the cause of virtue" (L 1:32–3). In the second *Enquiry*, Hume tried to correct for this, by singing the praises of virtues, such as benevolence and generosity, in a way that reflected the encomia for virtue for which Hutcheson, the practical moralist, was renowned. Hume, too, considered himself a practical moralist. He meant for his moral theory to teach people their duty.

Because he based his moral sentimentalism on a Hobbesian moral anatomy, though, Hume's effort to chart a middle course faltered. As Reid observed, although Hume exalted the merits of virtue more noticeably in the second *Enquiry*, the principles of the second *Enquiry* remained the same as those of the *Treatise*. Reid asserted that "a more popular arrangement, great embellishment, and the omission of some metaphysical reasonings, have given a preference in the public esteem to the [second *Enquiry*]; but I find neither any new principles in it, nor any new arguments in support of the system common to both."[19] Hume, in his later work, may have resorted to "humanity" rather than "sympathy" as the ground of morals, but this did not alter the Hobbesian tenor of his system.

There were two markedly Hobbesian elements of Hume's moral system, present in both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*. First, by distinguishing between man in his natural state and in his civilized state, Hume treated the natural state as something deficient, something to be over-

come, even transformed by means of the mechanisms of society that make us social and virtuous. In this sense, he did not treat nature normatively. Reid commented: "If one should say, that the state of infancy is a more natural state than that of manhood or of old age, I am apt to think that this would be words without any meaning." A non-Hobbesian manner of thinking, according to Reid, would regard "every state of society" as "equally natural, wherein men have access to exert their natural powers about their proper objects, and to improve those powers by the means which their situation affords."[20]

Second, because Hume regarded justice as the convention that marks the transfer from a primitive to a civilized state, he in effect made all virtue artificial, or conventional, as the skeptics Hobbes and Mandeville had. Reid, again, shed light on this consequence of Hume's position that justice is artificial. Because Hume supposed "a state of human nature, wherein all society and intercourse is cut off between man and man . . . it is evident . . . that so solitary a being would be as much incapable of justice as of social discourse and conversation." But if there is no social discourse and conversation, according to Hume's system, there is no way to take up the impartial, or common view, by which we declare the natural virtues to be virtues. As both Reid and Lord Kames realized, in a presocial state characterized by solitude and misery, the natural virtues of friendship, generosity, and compassion would be feckless. Even if they were present, they could not prop up society, nor would savages have the mental tools (either the "sympathy" by which to take up the common point of view or the "humanity" that arises in society) by which to regard them as virtues. Reid concluded, for this reason, that "if [Hume's] argument prove justice to be an artificial virtue, it will, with equal force, prove every social virtue to be artificial."[21]

The creation of justice takes absolute precedence in Hume's account of the origin of moral distinctions. In the absence of the convention of justice, the psychological components that, in Hume's account, are necessary for the production of impartial moral distinctions are absent. General rules of morality must be created. And these general rules of morality are conventional. They follow upon the creation of the conventions of justice and government that also have as their aim the mitigation of human partiality that plagues the primitive condition of man. For Hume, modern commercial society constitutes the most preferable kind of social

arrangement precisely because of its promotion of humanity, which he construed as the foundation of impartial moral judgment. This dependence of the sentiment of humanity on certain social, political, and economic conventions—specifically those of commercial society—reveals that, in Hume's system, the sentiment of humanity, together with the impartial moral point of view it generates, is ultimately the product of human artifice. As a result, his system, as initially presented in the *Treatise* and as revised in the second *Enquiry*, reflects the principles of the moral skeptics.

## THE PRIORITY OF JUSTICE IN HUME'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

The general rules of justice are the indispensable first step on humanity's progression from partial to more "general views of things" (T 3.3.1.23). In his presentation of the origin of justice and society in book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume showed that society can neither come into existence nor be sustained without a remedy for human partiality. That remedy, moreover, which consists in artificial rules of justice, depends on the restraint and redirection of human partiality. Hume did acknowledge that human beings exhibit a limited natural sociability, which he located in the relation between the sexes that forms the basis of family life. But this kind of limited generosity, which gives human beings a preference for their relations and acquaintances, is nevertheless incapable of sustaining life in society, beyond relatively small familial and tribal units (T 3.2.2.4). This kind of limited generosity also thwarts impartial moral reasoning, since partial affections, according to Hume, are so strong that they influence not only "our behavior and conduct in society" but also "our ideas of vice and virtue." Hume wrote, in fact, that "our natural uncultivated ideas of morality, instead of providing a remedy for the partiality of our affections, do rather conform themselves to that partiality, and give it an additional force and influence" (T 3.2.2.8).

Hume thought it "impossible [for human beings] to live in society without restraining themselves by certain rules" (T 3.2.7.11). Because society is created to resolve problems stemming not only from human partiality but also from the instability and scarcity of goods, the general rules of justice, which bring society into existence, pertain primarily to the protection and peaceful exchange of material goods (T 3.2.2.7). In his con-

jectural narrative of the origin of justice, Hume argued that "the chief impediment to this project of society and partnership lies in the avidity and selfishness of their natural temper; to remedy which, [individuals] enter into a convention for the stability of possession, and for mutual restraint and forbearance" (T 3.2.3.3): "No one can doubt that the convention for the distinction of property, and for the stability of possession, is of all circumstances the most necessary to the establishment of human society" (T 3.2.2.12).

Our aversion to the solitary misery of our natural, presocial condition is what causes us to "govern ourselves by rules" (T 3.2.3.3; T 3.2.4.1). In order to avoid confusion, particularly in relation to property, Hume insisted that "we must . . . proceed by general rules, and regulate ourselves by general interests" (T 3.2.10.3). Shared material interests are the glue that keeps society together. And he repeated that the chief advantage of society consists in the secure enjoyment of our possessions and our ability to do what we will with them (T 3.2.2.9). It is for this reason that the three laws of justice that Hume specified—property rights, transference of property by consent, and the obligation of promises—are the rules that make commerce possible, rendering trade "more safe and commodious" (T 3.2.2.24).[22]

The general rules of justice inaugurate the practice of corrective reasoning, which allows us, for example, to settle property disputes not according to personal merit or private benevolence, but according to fixed "general rules" that have a tendency to benefit society as a whole (T 3.2.6.9). By reflecting on justice, we, for the first time, take into account the interests of "the whole society alike," rather than simply our own peculiar circumstances (T 3.3.1.13). We thereby begin to approve of actions that accord with "general rules, which are unchangeable by spite and favour, and by particular views of private or public interest" (T 3.2.6.9).

The laws of justice, Hume contended, are "universal and perfectly inflexible." Their universality and inflexibility do not permit of exception, which is one reason, he thought, that justice is a factitious virtue. It partakes of none of the partiality characteristic of daily human decisions, which are often short-sighted, driven by "present motives and inclinations" (T 3.2.6.9). The general rule, for example, "*that possession must be stable*," ought to "extend to the whole society, and be inflexible either by spite or favour" (T 3.2.3.3). Similarly, the rules regarding the distribution of property must

be "general in their application, and more free from doubt and uncertainty" than rules derived from relations "of fitness or suitableness," if they are going to rescue human beings from that misery that attends their more natural state (T 3.2.4.1).

Reflection on the general rules of justice moves us from particular to more abstract kinds of reasoning that are absent in humanity's natural state. Hume acknowledged, for example, that the duty of repaying a loan is "unintelligible" to a person in a rude, or more natural, condition, because it depends on a mutually advantageous scheme of cooperation invented by human beings. Meanwhile, the duty of repaying a loan is perfectly understandable to a person in a civilized state, who is "train'd up according to a certain discipline and education" (T 3.2.1.9). By approving of a person's honesty—expressed in her proclivity to repay a loan—we exhibit some "*regard to public interest*" that is simply absent in a rude or natural human state (T 3.2.1.11).

All artificial virtues, such as justice, are dependent on schemes of cooperation. Justice, for Hume, is a virtue that comes into being after the general rules of justice have been instituted, mostly as a result of each person's concern for his own interest (T 3.3.1.9). Eventually a "strong sentiment of morals" develops that "concurs with interest" and causes us to approve of acts of justice (T 3.2.5.11). This approval proceeds "from nothing but our sympathy with the interests of society" (T 3.3.1.12). The moral belief that justice is a virtue is grounded in the sympathetic pleasure one feels in response to actions conducive to social peace and the sympathetic pain one feels in response to actions destructive of social peace. This moral belief, instilled by public and private instruction, depends on the awareness that if our partial affections were left unrestrained, as they are in humanity's natural state, then "society must immediately dissolve, and every one must fall into that savage and solitary condition, which is infinitely worse than the worst situation that can possibly be suppos'd in society" (T 3.2.2.22; T 3.2.2.25). For this reason, Hume described justice as "infinitely advantageous" (T 3.2.2.22).

In spite of Hume's assertion that justice is "infinitely advantageous," however, Jacqueline Taylor contends that "Hume is not committed to giving justice absolute precedence over the natural virtues."[23] This makes sense, given Taylor's argument that it is the natural sentiment of humanity, not the laws of justice, that is principally responsible for helping "us form

more general, less partial views about what is most useful and will most contribute to the happiness of society and its members."[24] It is difficult, however, not to give justice absolute precedence in Hume's system when the ability to conceptualize the general interest and to regulate one's affections in accord with the general interest is simply inaccessible to the rude, untaught savage. This ability to regulate one's taste and affections in an abstract manner goes "beyond anything that is supported by instinctive sympathy or immediate benevolence" in humanity's ruder and more natural state, in the absence of the artifice of justice.[25]

Hume insisted in the *Treatise* that neither the natural sentiment of humanity, nor extensive sympathy (with the well-being of strangers), nor private benevolence is capable on its own of lifting human beings above that limited generosity that proves nearly as destructive of society as "the most narrow selfishness" (T 3.2.2.6). He insisted that there is no "inartificial principle" that is capable of curtailing the innate partiality that infects both thought and action. This partiality is one of the defining attributes of "rude and savage men," who, without the artifice of justice, would never be inspired to exhibit "an equitable conduct towards each other" (T 3.2.2.8). "If men pursu'd the public interest naturally, and with a hearty affection," Hume remarked, "they wou'd never have dream'd of restraining each other by these rules [of justice]; and if they pursu'd their own interest, without any precaution, they wou'd run head-long into every kind of injustice and violence" (T 3.2.2.21).

Hume argued that humans "are, in a great measure, govern'd by interest" and do not "look farther than their nearest friends and acquaintance" (T 3.2.7.1). Only upon reflection within society do we begin to look further than our nearest friends and acquaintances, toward the common interest—namely, the survival of society—that we share with those around us. And we share this common interest not only with friends and family, but also with strangers. In this way, our affections, which are naturally constrained by immediate sympathy with friends and relations, are broadened, by an artificial convention "contrary to the common principles of human nature," so that we develop a concern for the well-being of strangers within the same society (T 3.2.6.9). By means of justice, "we maintain society, which is so necessary to . . . well-being and subsistence" (T 3.2.2.9). And it is for this reason that Hume wrote that "no virtue is more esteem'd than justice" (T 3.3.1.9).

## SYMPATHY AND MORAL JUDGMENT IN THE *TREATISE*

Hume contended that truly moral judgments require that characters and manners be "consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest" (T 3.1.2.4). Cohon, in her reconstruction of Hume's moral theory in the *Treatise*, argues that it is by means of extensive sympathy that we arrive at the common point of view. With a view to Hume's account in the *Treatise*, however, it seems as if human beings do not possess the native mental tools necessary to arrive at the common point of view, by extensive sympathy, without the artificial reconfiguration of the moral sentiment accomplished by the convention of justice.[26] As Hume insisted, there is no "inartificial principle of the human mind" that can "control those partial affections" (T 3.2.2.8). Our partiality is so deeply ingrained in human nature that it cannot be corrected by any "natural and inartificial passions of men" (T 3.2.2.21).

Hume acknowledged that there is a conflict between extensive sympathy and limited generosity, that is, the partiality for which justice serves as a corrective (T 3.3.1.23). In his effort to resolve this difficulty, Hume distinguished between moral taste—a calm passion—and our partial affections, such as love and hatred, which are more violent passions that tend more readily to influence action (T 2.1.1.3). Moral reflection depends on the imagination, which produces a special kind of moral feeling that does not always control our passions (T 3.3.1.23). He stated, for example, that an impartial moral judgment, which is dependent on extensive sympathy, does not have the same "influence on our love and hatred" as "when our own interest is concern'd, or that of our particular friends" (T 3.3.1.18). For Hume, then, our confined generosity, which consists of unequal affections, need not preclude the possibility of abstract moral judgments. The latter influence our taste, but the former is more likely to influence our actions and affections (T 3.3.1.23).

Nevertheless, the tension between limited and extensive sympathy in the *Treatise* remains evident. And this tension renders questionable whether a human being in the ruder, more natural condition can make impartial moral judgments prior to the reconfiguration of the moral sentiments by the artifice of justice. To achieve the common point of view, "on which moral distinctions depend," Hume argued, we must "confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character" (T 3.3.1.30). "When the natural ten-

dency of his passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere," he continued, "we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those who have a more particular connexion with him" (T 3.3.3.2). When we sympathize with the narrow circles in which people live, we leave our own interests behind and engage in the kind of moral reflection that is facilitated by extensive sympathy. By this process, we correct "momentary appearance" and attain the common point of view characteristic of genuine moral judgments (T 3.3.1.5; T 3.3.1.18; T 3.3.1.30).

We are naturally inclined, however, to "sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers" (T 3.3.1.14). And it is only by the artificial principle of justice that human beings enter society, conceptualize general rules and general interests, and extend their sympathy, which is normally limited to friends and acquaintances, to include strangers, including those strangers who live within any given person's narrow circle. The more general views of things on which moral judgments depend are thereby precluded from human beings in their ruder, more natural condition, who, in the absence of justice, lack extensive sympathy.

## HUMANITY AND MORAL JUDGMENT IN THE SECOND *ENQUIRY*

The primary shortcoming of the moral theory of the *Treatise*, according to Ryan Hanley, is that sympathy is limited by contiguity, while the feeling of humanity, which Hume emphasized in the second *Enquiry*, is rooted in the resemblances that human beings share with one another, making it a more effective impetus for the jump from partiality to impartiality.[27] Jacqueline Taylor has shed light on this and other difficulties in the *Treatise*, including the seemingly devastating insight that those in a person's narrow circle, with whom we sympathize when making judgments from the common point of view, might have unrefined tastes and improperly regulated loves themselves.[28] Sympathizing with the narrow circle does not guarantee sound moral judgment. Taylor, too, has suggested that Hume, in his mature moral theory, amended his theory so that it depends not on sympathy, but on humanity, as the natural sentiment that elevates human beings from partial to more general points of view.[29]

The natural sentiment of humanity seems to provide Hume with a means by which, even before the institution of justice, human beings might counter the influence of their partiality and make impartial moral judgments. According to Hume, humanity, which is a principle present in "all human creatures," is "a feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery" (EPM 9.7; EPM App. 1.3). And this sentiment of humanity is what Hume in the second *Enquiry* called "the foundation of morals," which causes us to judge in favor of qualities and actions with "useful and beneficial" tendencies (EPM 9.6; EPM App. 1.3).

In the *Treatise*, however, Hume seemed to have denied the existence of the natural sentiment of humanity. According to his science of the passions in the *Treatise*, there is no possibility of a general love for humankind.[30] Love, in the *Treatise*, is inherently partial. He explained the origin of the passion of love in this way: "Whoever can find the means either by his services, his beauty, or his flattery, to render himself useful or agreeable to us, is sure of our affections: as on the other hand, whoever harms or displeases us never fails to excite our anger or hatred" (T 2.2.3.2). Love, at least initially, arises from considerations of our own pleasure and interest: "In general, it may be affirm'd, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself" (T 3.2.1.12). He acknowledged that human beings do not naturally love or hate a person according to abstract considerations, that is, the degree to which they possess a good or bad quality. If that were the case, there would be far fewer instances of disparate moral judgments: "Were there an universal love among all human creatures, it wou'd appear after the same manner. Any degree of a good quality wou'd cause a stronger affection than the same degree of a bad quality wou'd cause hatred; contrary to what we find by experience" (T 3.2.1.12).

There is some correspondence that Hume allowed between virtue and vice and love and hatred. He noted that virtue tends to produce love or pride, just as vice tends to produce humility or hatred (T 3.3.1.3). It is possible, then, in his moral theory, for individuals to love the virtuous and desire their welfare. In fact, Hume considered this to be "the good or ill desert of virtue or vice" (T 3.3.1.31). But the ability to love an individual based on general, rather than partial, considerations, for example, her basic humanity or virtuous character, cannot, according to Hume's moral psychology, be attained by the rude, untaught savage. This skill belongs to the "man of tem-

per and judgment" who can distinguish between morals and interests, who can separate the hatred he feels for his enemy and the virtues his enemy possesses. It is only by custom and habit, education and training that an individual "who has the command of himself, can separate these feelings, and give praise to what deserves it" (T 3.1.2.4). Love, in other words, is an affection that can be aligned with abstract considerations of justice, virtue, or humanity only by means of training and education in society.

Hume admitted that it is difficult to love in accord with "universal views and considerations" rather than "private connexions" (EPM 5.42n25). He had already expressed this principle in the *Treatise*: "'Tis seldom men heartily love what lies at a distance from them, and what no way redounds to their particular benefit" (T 3.3.1.18). The wise person, however, can not only overlook his own interest in making general judgments—and thereby "correct those sentiments of blame, which so naturally arise upon any opposition"—but also control his loves so that they match his more general views (T 3.3.1.17). The wise person, accustomed to society, can thereby say that the survey of virtue not only commands my taste but also "command[s] my love and esteem" (T 3.3.1.25). This kind of abstract love, however, whether of the virtuous person or of humanity in general, is entirely inaccessible to the rude, untaught savage. Neither extensive sympathy nor the general love of humanity appears capable of promoting impartial moral viewpoints in the absence of law and government, society and conversation.

## THE CENTRALITY OF CONVENTION IN HUME'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

In the second *Enquiry*, Hume made clear that a "rude, untaught savage" does not regulate his affections according to abstract determinations of virtue and vice. A person "accustomed to society," on the other hand, is much more likely to do so: "A rude, untaught savage regulates chiefly his love and hatred by the ideas of private utility and injury." The rude, untaught savage is incapable of *regulating* his love and hatred by more impartial and general measures of character—and even of *making* impartial and general judgments of character—because the savage has only "faint conceptions of a general rule or system of behavior" (EPM 9.8n57).

In fact, the rude, untaught savage is ignorant of a number of general systems of behavior, or conventions, that must be established before impartial moral distinctions can develop. Moral distinctions, after all, are only ever valid if they are impartial. The conventions of justice and government, which make large society possible, and the convention of good breeding, which makes polite conversation possible, are all required for impartial moral distinctions to take place.[31] These conventions give rise to society and conversation. And it is in society and conversation, Hume argued, that the person who is "accustomed to society" finally becomes capable of undertaking "more enlarged reflections" on the subject of morals (EPM 9.8n57).[32]

In both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*, Hume contended that the contradictory judgments of characters and manners with which we are confronted in society and conversation are resolved by the creation of a certain kind of linguistic convention.[33] This convention fixes the moral terminology that enables us to distinguish between virtue and vice. A certain moral language must arise to help us separate moral distinctions from interested affections. "Language must soon be moulded upon [these distinctions], and must invent a peculiar set of terms," Hume argued, "in order to express those universal sentiments of censure or approbation, which arise from humanity, or from views of general usefulness and its contrary. Virtue and vice become then known: Morals are recognized: Certain general ideas are framed of human conduct and behavior." Only after this moral language arises, Hume remarked, "are the particular sentiments of self-love [namely, avarice and ambition] frequently controuled and limited" (EPM 9.8).

"The language of self-love," by which "a man denominates another his enemy, his rival, his antagonist, his adversary," is not, Hume insisted, the language of morality. The language of morality requires that a person "depart from his private and particular situation" and assume a "common point of view" (EPM 9.6).[34] And it would seem as if this moral language is, as all languages are, according to Hume, "establish'd by human convention" (T 3.2.2.10). And it would also seem as if this convention is yet another, like those of justice, government, and good manners, that has as its end the mitigation of partiality, that is, the private interests that stem from avarice and ambition and cause social conflict.

Hume expressed the same idea in the *Treatise* when he maintained that the development of the moral sentiment in society depends on ad-

herence to "the general rules of morality." These general rules seem not only to exist on the same plane as other conventions, but also to follow from them, since those other conventions, namely, the conventions of justice, government, and good breeding, are conventions that sustain the realm of society and conversation (T 3.3.1.18). And Hume professed that it is "in common life and conversation" that moral evaluations take place and that moral language is formed (T 3.3.4.4). He argued that "the intercourse of sentiments . . . *in society and conversation* . . . makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners" (T 3.3.3.2). The development of moral language rooted in the sentiment of humanity, then, depends on the support of these prior conventions.

## THE SUPERIORITY OF MODERN COMMERCIAL SOCIETY

Social structures matter for moral evaluation. They can help or hinder the process by which we, by means of the sentiment of humanity, make moral distinctions. Jacqueline Taylor argues that Hume, who, in Enlightenment fashion, made the promotion of humanity central to his moral project, "examines the negative effects of inhumanity . . . and again looks at the legal, political, and economic contexts that allow inhumanity to take hold, especially in those with power over others."[35] Hume, according to Taylor, "is not a relativist about justice and social arrangements."[36] He, in fact, employed his political science to condemn political and economic arrangements insofar as they pervert or diminish our sense of humanity.[37] Taylor, applying a Humean line of reasoning, mentions polygamy and slavery, as well as other social arrangements that exacerbate power inequalities—particularly in regard to race and gender—as "inhumane" from a Humean perspective.[38]

Taylor acknowledges Hume's strong claims on behalf of the virtues of commercial society, which are rooted in his belief that commercial practices are reliable sources of humanity.[39] Nevertheless, Taylor does not think that Hume draws a bright-line distinction between ancient and modern societies.[40] Instead, Taylor suggests that "Hume gives a fairly balanced treatment of ancient and modern societies."[41] According to Taylor's interpretation, Hume offers a moral defense of any society that encourages justice, benevolence, and humanity, be that society ancient or modern.

It seems, however, that Hume thinks not only that modern society is superior to ancient society in the promotion of humanity, but that modern commercial society, in particular, like that in which he lived and which he had seen produce drastic improvements in quality of life in Scotland during the eighteenth century, contained precisely the kind of conventions necessary to cultivate the sentiment of humanity that, according to Hume, is the foundation of morals.[42]

One of Hume's central points, in both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*, is that moral judgment, the propensity to distinguish between traits odious and laudable, is natural, rooted in the moral sentiment. It would thus seem that, whether a person inhabited an ancient, feudal, or commercial society, he or she would be equally capable of distinguishing virtue from vice. And in the *Essays*, Hume conceded quite plainly that all human beings, in all ages, praise certain moral characters. In his essay "Of the Standard of Taste," published in *Four Dissertations*, Hume wrote, "It is indeed obvious that writers of all nations and all ages concur in applauding justice, humanity, magnanimity, prudence, veracity; and in blaming the opposite qualities" (E-ST 228). And in the second *Enquiry*, too, he contended that "an Athenian and a French man of merit [would] certainly resemble each other," exhibiting "good sense, knowledge, wit, eloquence, humanity, fidelity, truth, justice, courage, temperance, constancy, [and] dignity of mind."[43]

Hume made this last assertion, about the similarities between an Athenian and a French man of merit, in order to disprove the relativistic approach to morals defended by Palamedes in the Dialogue that is appended to his second *Enquiry*. Hume accounted for the different moral standards that arise in different nations and ages by arguing that the same principles of morals are expressed differently in various circumstances. The principles that remain universal, for Hume, are those he defends throughout his philosophical writings, namely, that human beings praise those qualities that are "useful, or agreeable to a man himself, or to others" (D 37). He admitted that in certain social arrangements there is a tendency to arrive at "erroneous conclusions" about virtue and vice. Nevertheless, he remarked, these erroneous conclusions "can be corrected by sounder reasoning and larger experience" (D 36).

Hume acknowledged that sounder reasoning and larger experience can be facilitated by laws and institutions. After all, different moral judgments arise in different social arrangements. He suggested that "the differ-

ences of moral sentiment, which naturally arise from a republican or monarchical government, are also very obvious; as well as those which proceed from general riches or poverty, union or faction, ignorance or learning" (D 51). Interestingly, Hume highlighted throughout his corpus the poverty, faction, and ignorance that plagued ancient and feudal societies. And in the *History of England*, he praised the modern civilized age because of its "close connexion with virtue and humanity," while dismissing the "many barbarous ages" that preceded it, because of their lack of such a connection (HIST 2:518–19). In fact, he regarded the age beginning with the Tudors as "the useful, as well as the more agreeable part of modern annals," in which commercial activity began to alleviate poverty, centralized government began to mitigate faction, and the state church curbed the independent influence of ignorance and superstition on public affairs (HIST 3:81–82). In these passages, Hume clearly issued a positive moral judgment of the modern age on account of the virtue and humanity it made possible.

Hume followed Montesquieu in arguing that commercial mores were productive of peace and good morals. In the first edition of the second *Enquiry*, Hume described Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* as "the best system of political knowledge, that, perhaps, has ever yet been communicated to the world."[44] For both Montesquieu and Hume, commerce between nations gave rise to a cosmopolitan ethos and a spirit of self-improvement.[45] This allowed England, for example, to learn from French politesse, and France to learn from England's system of economic liberty.[46] As Montesquieu observed, "Commerce has spread knowledge of the mores of all nations everywhere; they have been compared to each other, and good things have resulted from this."[47]

But Montesquieu was more skeptical than Hume about the sufficiency of a system of morality derived solely from a modern commercial way of life. Montesquieu acknowledged that commerce "polishes and softens barbarous mores." But though Montesquieu admitted that "commerce cures destructive prejudices," making mores "less fierce," he also argued that "commerce corrupts pure mores." According to Montesquieu, commerce corrupted pure morals by substituting the motive of interest for the motive of humanity, so that "the smallest things, those required by humanity, are done or given for money."[48] Montesquieu also criticized individuals in commercial societies who valued all things by wealth and who spoke only "of manufacturing, commerce, finance, wealth, and even luxury."[49]

Montesquieu, unlike Hume, perceived that there was some value in barbarous mores. Montesquieu provided a qualified defense of honor-yielding institutions in feudal society, which he described as the only effective counter to a moral and legal system built on the principle of economic expediency alone. Institutions built on the principle of honor, though the product of a more feudal and barbarous era, could, according to Montesquieu, produce a spirit of self-sacrifice and moderation missing from commercial society.[50] For Montesquieu, a premodern conception of honor could serve as a correction for commercial excess.

Hume acknowledged that warlike societies and peaceful societies produce entirely different moral sentiments. And he argued the former held no value in the modern world. Feudal society was bellicose, commercial society peaceful. "And indeed, we may observe," Hume wrote, "that, as the difference between war and peace is the greatest that arises among nations and public societies, it produces also the greatest variations in moral sentiment, and diversifies the most our ideas of virtue and personal merit" (D 39). In civilized societies, Hume suggested, military virtues have neither the same allure nor the same usefulness as they possessed in barbaric and feudal societies, where, for example, manorial, imperial, and ecclesiastical actors constantly needed to defend their territorial and jurisdictional claims. Hume even bemoaned "the evils, which this suppos'd virtue has produc'd in human society." Observing the devastation caused by martial heroism, he observed that "men of cool reflection are not so sanguine in their praises of [heroism, or military glory]." Instead, "we are more inclin'd to hate than admire the ambition of heroes" (T 3.3.2.15).

Here Hume, pointing to the evil tendencies of a bygone conception of heroism, regarded that kind of heroism as a vice, rather than a virtue, something to be hated rather than loved. According to Hume, the "uncultivated" and "barbarous" societies that made courage "the predominant excellence," one that was "most celebrated by poets, recommended by parents and instructors, and admired by the public in general," produced a different ethical system from the one that moderns enjoy. He credited this difference to the fact that feudal and barbarous societies did not have "full experience of the advantages attending beneficence, justice, and the social virtues" (EPM 7.15). The premodern Anglo-Saxons, for example, did not enjoy the "full experience" of justice. Instead, they were "in general a rude, uncultivated people . . . untamed to submission under law and govern-

ment." They were, Hume noted, "very little advanced beyond the rude state of nature" (see HIST 1:53, 166–67; 2:251). Neither feudal nor ancient societies, on Hume's account, truly fulfill the requirements of justice that he laid out in book 3 of the *Treatise*. They consequently gave rise to a nonideal sphere of society and conversation in which to construct moral judgments. It is for this reason, Hume suggested, that "the ethics of Homer, in this particular, [are] very different from those of Fénelon, his elegant imitator" (EPM 7.15).

Hume did, at one point, note the similarities between the moral views present in the works of the poets "from Homer down to Fenelon," who "bestow their applause and blame on the same virtues and vices" (E-ST 228). Hume nevertheless remarked that Homer's heroes are much less laudable than Fénelon's. In Homer, for example, Achilles's heroism is conjoined with ferocity. Ulysses's prudence is conjoined with cunning and fraud. In the modern writer Fénelon, however, the hero Telemachus is far more virtuous, displaying great honesty and integrity. The modern writer, inhabiting a civilized society, is evidently far more capable of making valid moral judgments and of depicting them in art. The modern writer can separate the wheat of prudence from the chaff of fraud. The ancient writers, on the other hand, including Homer, display a "want of humanity and of decency" in their moral judgment, and this want "diminishes considerably the merit of their noble performances, and gives modern authors an advantage over them." Hume confessed that "we are displeased to find the limits of vice and virtue so much confounded" (E-ST 246). He attributed this lack of humanity, which produces insufficient moral distinctions, to the inability of ancient social arrangements to produce the level of humanity needed to make proper moral distinctions. There is no avoiding Hume's clear preference for modernity on this point.[51]

Hume condemned not only the martial bravery lauded by ancient and feudal societies, but also the piety that was praised throughout the medieval era. In fact, Hume, differing from every other Scottish Enlightenment writer, did *not* include piety in his catalogue of virtues and even transferred the supposed "monkish virtues" to his catalogue of vices (EPM 9.3).[52] According to his rendering of history, "after Christianity became the established religion," priests "engendered a spirit of persecution, which has ever since been the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government" (E-PG 62).[53] Religion, as a source of

"bigotry or superstition," served, like the bellicosity of ancient and feudal regimes, to "confound the sentiments of morality, and alter the natural boundaries of vice and virtue" (E-ST 247).[54]

Modern commercial society, however, reflects a value system that, according to Hume, is different from, and superior to, premodern social arrangements, including the classical republics, which prioritized political liberty and martial courage, and the confessional states, which prioritized piety. The faction, violence, and ignorance promoted by these older social arrangements confounded moral judgments. The partiality of precommercial social arrangements, moreover, reinforced partial judgments of characters and manners, which were reflective of the friend–enemy language of self-love rather than the language of morality. Partial judgments of this kind are invalid moral judgments, insofar as they fail to attain that impartiality which Hume considered characteristic of true moral distinctions.

According to Hume's moral theory, actions and affections that correspond with calm, impartial judgments rather than violent, partial judgments advance the interests of society and the long-term interests of the individual. Naturally, however, "the temptation of present ease or pleasure" disrupts the pursuit of "more distant profit and enjoyment." The prospect of "small enjoyment" at the present moment obstructs "all distant views to fame, health, or fortune" (EPM 6.15). It is more natural for human beings to act for the benefit of friends rather than enemies, or strangers, just as it is more natural for human beings to act for the sake of nearer, rather than more distant, pleasures. For this reason, they must develop the virtue of strength of mind to order their actions toward long-term profit and enjoyment rather than the quick satisfaction that comes from vengeance or fraud, for example (T 2.3.3.9–10). Still, Hume argued in the *Treatise* "that when we wou'd govern a man, and push him to any action, 'twill commonly be better policy to work upon the violent rather than the calm passions, and rather take him by his inclination, than what is vulgarly call'd his *reason*" (T 2.3.4.1). A civilized government that enforces the rules of justice makes the threat of punishment greater than the prospect of illicit gain. It opens people's minds to the good of society as a whole, which stretches beyond the confines of smaller familial, manorial, or religious units. This innovation transforms human instinct, forcing the normally myopic individual to be more attentive to long-term individual and collective interest in a way that individuals in premodern social arrangement simply could not be.

According to Hume, uncultivated, noncommercial nations, by creating entire social arrangements based on partiality, failed to bring about the universal reign of humanity. The values of modernity, meanwhile, are universally attainable, unlike the values of warlike or superstitious peoples, who require enemies to vanquish and heretics to banish. Hume remarked, for example, in the essay "Of National Characters," in which he argued that the mores of different peoples are the result of moral rather than physical causes, that "courage, of all national qualities, is the most precarious; because it is exerted only at intervals, and by a few in every nation; whereas industry, knowledge, and civility, may be of constant and universal use, and for several ages, may become habitual to the whole people" (E-NC 212).

By cultivating the sentiment of humanity, a society can, according to Hume, finally banish those false moral judgments that conform to, rather than correct, humanity's innate partiality. Martial courage and piety, from this perspective, grow not out of "humanity," but out of an excessive concern for one's own group—whether tribe, religion, or nation. And these supposed virtues justify violence, exclusion, and withdrawal from society in ways that, in Hume's terms, are pernicious, rather than useful or beneficial.

Advanced societies, on the other hand, generate the kinds of conversations that direct human beings toward general views, common interests, and beneficial tendencies. Hume's *Political Discourses*, the most immediately successful of his published works, contained essays vindicating commercial mores and international trade. He posited that economic expansion, derived from an increase in labor, trade, manufacturing, and the consumption of luxury goods, produced gains in sociability, morals, arts, and sciences. In advanced societies, he remarked in the essay "Of Refinement in the Arts," human beings no longer live in "solitude, or live with their fellow-citizens in that distant manner, which is peculiar to ignorant and barbarous nations." Instead, they "flock into cities" and after greater communication and commerce find "an increase of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other's pleasure and entertainment" (E-RA 271). Consequently, "the tempers of men are softened as well as their knowledge improved" and "humanity appears still more conspicuous, and is the chief characteristic which distinguishes a civilized age from times of barbarity and ignorance" (E-RA 274).

## ARTIFICIAL SOCIALIZATION AS A SALVIFIC ENTERPRISE

Hume, a social scientist concerned with the institutional origins of civilization, found in modern commercial practices the most effective "artificial socialization devices" available to humanity.[55] And without these artificial socialization devices, there is no way to breathe life into the sentiment of humanity, the foundation of morals, that is missing from the savage but present in the breast of the civilized person, who is accustomed to society.

Though Hume, in both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*, tried to establish a *via media* between the natural sociability theorists—Shaftesbury and Hutcheson—and the selfish theorists of morals—Hobbes and Mandeville—he ultimately seems to have sanctioned the central insight of the latter, namely, that morality is conventional all the way down. Hume's narrative of the progress of human society shows how the general rules of justice, of government, of good manners and morals, all of which are the product of artifice, succeed one another and are justified by their usefulness. For Hume, the "general standard of vice and virtue" is, in the end, "founded chiefly," like the rest of these conventions, "on general usefulness" (EPM 5.42n25).

Mackie claimed that Hume's moral theory would be more convincing—and more consistent—if Hume plainly asserted what is implied in his texts, namely, that the use of moral language, by which we praise the so-called artificial virtues and the so-called natural virtues, is "similarly supported by what we can understand as conventions."[56] And Annette Baier, too, concluded, "I can agree with Mackie that some 'artifice' is needed for the recognition of all the Humean virtues, since some artifice is essential in adopting the viewpoint needed for 'seeing' them."[57] The conventions of justice, government, and polite manners are instituted to further the interests of society. And moral language, which is developed within society and conversation and which underlies all appellations of virtue and vice, is similarly used to further "the interests of society" (EPM 2.17), and along with it, the long-term interest of the individual.[58]

Hume's political theory provides an institutional formula by which self-interest, in the form of avarice and ambition, might redirect and restrain itself. It is for this reason that Baier, who described Hume's conjectural narrative of the origin of justice as a replacement of the biblical narrative of fall and redemption, called justice, in Hume's theory, "the recipe

for our salvation."[59] Hume's approach to politics requires an understanding of what salvation entails, that is, a vision of the world not only as it is, but also as it might be, in a way that contributes to the "good of all."[60]

## THE OUTPUT OF HUME'S POLITICAL SCIENCE: THE GOOD OF ALL

Hume's elaborate moral psychology explains how social and political institutions produce a nearly miraculous transformation of self-interest into "the good of all." Hume is sometimes cast by contemporary scholars as a political realist, that is, a theorist who thinks of politics as an autonomous realm, a realm that produces its own standards of judgment and that operates independently of prepolitical moral commitments. This position is not altogether different from that of the contemporary political liberal, who, following the thought of Rawls, argues that a conception of justice and society can be "strictly political," detached from an overarching, comprehensive doctrine of life and morals. But Hume, who searched for institutional mechanisms by which to produce the "good of all," did not shy away from articulating what he meant by "the good of all." Nor could he.

Clearly, Hume argued for the superiority of commercial society. But to the extent that any political theory points toward "better" social and political arrangements, it needs to specify what is good. And this is a moral endeavor. No political regime, no theory of justice, no account of political life can be "strictly political," independent of deeper questions regarding the nature of the good, of virtue, and of happiness. This is something both Rawlsian political liberalism and contemporary political realism—two of the most popular methodological approaches to political thought today—get wrong.

To Hume's credit, he realized, as Aristotle had long before him, that politics has a moral aim. The ultimate goal of life in society is not to live, but to live well. But what does it mean to live well? To answer this question, one must possess a moral theory that enables her to understand what it means to live a good life. He provided such an account.

Again, political realism in its contemporary form rejects the "priority of the moral over the political."[61] It is opposed to conceiving of politics as "applied ethics."[62] But this distinction is nowhere to be found in Hume, whose political theory takes for granted what he, based on his moral theory,

supposed to be "good." In the *Treatise*, Hume repeatedly equated pleasure with the good.[63] In so doing, he adopted the psychological hedonism evident in the writings of Hobbes and Locke. As Cohon rightly notes, "Hume is a hedonist, in the sense that he takes the good in life to be pleasure and the evil to be pain or uneasiness."[64]

Certainly Hume, in the controversial essay "Of Suicide," confirmed that the good in life is measured by pleasure while the evil in life is measured by pain or burden. For Hume, when the latter is expected to routinely outweigh the former, life is no longer worth living. Although "Of Suicide" was not published until after Hume's death, it had circulated during his lifetime. Its contents were sufficiently dispersed in Scottish society that, when the stage play *Douglas* was performed in Edinburgh in 1756, the suicide of the hero's mother was said to exemplify "the cursed principles and doctrine [of the playwright John Home's] intimate acquaintance and beloved friend, David Home [*sic*] the Infidel, concerning the warrantableness of self-murder."[65]

Hume's stance on "self-murder" flowed from his hedonistic premises. And his principle of utility, which transformed Bentham's understanding of human affairs, so that Bentham, after his encounter with Hume's *Treatise*, "felt as if scales had fallen from my eyes," is also hedonistic in nature.[66] As Bentham would later argue, utility is concerned principally with the advancement of pleasure.[67] A political regime superior in its utility, then, is superior in its promotion of pleasure.

Utility and pleasure are, in Hume's account, the determinants of virtue. There are different catalogues of virtue, though.[68] And he provided his own catalogue. For Hume, virtue is far broader and more substantive than mere Machiavellian manliness, or public-spiritedness. Humean virtue is commercial, rather than martial, civic, or monastic in nature. One of his central points, after all, is that Stoic and Christian conceptions of virtue, which prioritize martial valor or monkish humility, respectively, do not contribute to the public good in a modern commercial society and thereby ought not to find institutional support in such a society.

Humean political science, which is oriented toward the "good of all," operates on a distinctive account of virtue and happiness, which, as evidenced by Bentham and later writers, colored how liberal theorists conceived of the role and purpose of law. Just as Hume had lambasted the Stoic and Christian approaches to happiness and virtue, Bentham railed

against the same approaches, which he thought were represented by the "philosophical party" and the "religious party," respectively, both of which, according to Bentham, championed the allegedly vain pursuit of "the *honourable* . . . , the *honestum*, the *decorum*" rather than pleasure. Bentham complained that Christians and Stoics had long banded together to discredit "the partisan of the principle of utility, whom they joined in branding with the odious name of Epicurean."[69] Bentham held fast to the Epicurean critique of the Socratic tradition, asserting that "Socrates and Plato were talking nonsense, on pretense of teaching morality and wisdom."[70] Bentham issued a theory of liberty that, like Hume's, demanded the exclusion of Stoic and Christian moral stridency from public law.

Isaiah Berlin described Hobbes and Bentham as the two major defenders of what he termed "negative liberty," that is, liberty defined as noninterference.[71] According to Quentin Skinner, a negative conception of liberty, which is unique to the liberal tradition, can be found in both the utilitarianism of Bentham and the contractarian tradition from Hobbes to Rawls.[72] According to this interpretation, liberty and law are in opposition. Law is an artifice that curbs antisocial behavior. Liberty, meanwhile, exists wherever law, or impediment, is absent. From this perspective, which Gassendi had presented deftly in the seventeenth century, law is implemented to provide enough security and liberty necessary to protect a sphere in which the individual can pursue happiness.

Happiness, in this way of thinking, is a psychological state that varies according to personal taste. It has nothing to do with the habituation of virtue, conceived as the idea of adhering to the natural law ascertained by right reason that directs individuals to the goods—such as religion, knowledge, and society—that constitute their flourishing. Law from the liberal perspective is both unreasonable and illegitimate if it reflects any partisan conception of happiness except for the partisan conception of happiness that says human happiness is a psychological state varying according to personal taste. "For no man can be so good a judge as the man himself, what it is gives him pleasure or displeasure," Bentham maintained.[73] In this way, a kind of subjectivism, or relativism, about human happiness is ingrained in the liberal imagination. And the idea that there are no facts about what is good and evil for human beings as human beings, aside from subjective calculations of pleasure and utility that differ from individual to individual, is a fixture in the liberal imagination, one that is not—and

indeed, cannot be—up for debate without effectively effacing one of liberalism's core distinctives.[74]

From Hobbes onward, modern political thinkers, at least those typically placed in the liberal canon, rejected the idea of the *summum bonum*, the ultimate good that all human beings pursue and that constitutes their happiness. In Hume's four essays on happiness, he personified three characters who defended ancient views on the *summum bonum*. "The Epicurean," in the first essay, exalts pleasure as the supreme good. "The Stoic," in the second essay, promotes civic virtue as the supreme good. "The Platonist," in the third essay, defends contemplation as the supreme good. In the final essay, "The Sceptic," which incorporates many of Hume's own views, the character presents a modern vision, according to which there is no supreme good.[75] The modern "Sceptic" maintains that happiness consists in a just calculation of action, pleasure, and contemplation, based on the subjective determinations of each individual.[76] The "Sceptic" declares:

> The inference upon the whole is, that it is not from the value or worth of the object, which any person pursues, that we can determine his enjoyment, but merely from the passion with which he pursues it, and the success which he meets with in his pursuit. Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves. They derive their worth merely from the passion. If that be strong, and steady, and successful, the person is happy. It cannot reasonably be doubted, but a little miss, dressed in a new gown for a dancing-school ball, receives as compleat enjoyment as the greatest orator, who triumphs in the splendor of his eloquence, while he governs the passions and resolutions of a numerous assembly. (E-Sc 166)

Referring to this passage in a conversation with Samuel Johnson, Boswell mentioned that, according to Hume, the "little miss with a new gown at a dancing school ball, a general at the head of a victorious army, and an orator, after having made an eloquent speech in a great assembly," were "equally happy." In response, Johnson suggested that "a peasant and a philosopher may be equally satisfied, but not equally happy. . . . A peasant has not capacity for having equal happiness with a philosopher." The "Sceptic's" approach to happiness provides no grounds on which to distinguish, as Johnson did, between the happiness of the peasant, the school-

girl, the general, and the philosopher. This approach rests upon a kind of emotive nonjudgmentalism. For "The Sceptic" as for Hume, all forms of enjoyment are equally conducive to happiness. This idea serves as a support for liberal toleration.

Hume's contemporaries judged rightly that he elevated feeling above reason. Since, according to the "Sceptic," there is no supreme good, the individual seeking happiness should not consult a philosopher, minister, or other "moral expert" for guidance but should instead consult his own feelings. By looking within, one might better understand his own temperament and determine, by a calculation of pleasure and utility, that which best promotes his own good. "The Sceptic," for this reason, is not a work of moral declamation, as are the other essays on happiness, which promote one way of life as best. "The Sceptic" is something else: a work of moral anatomy. And according to "The Sceptic's" moral anatomy, all ways of life are equally valid, if they derive from an appropriate calculation of pleasures and pains.

In this case, when individuals satisfy what Bayle called their master passion—that which determines thought and action—they are happy. Reason only points the way by which to satisfy that passion. "Thus," James Balfour (1705–95) declared, "virtue is represented [by Hume] as a subject of talk and declamation, but of very little force to influence the heart and life. That province is resigned to the passions, which must therefore rule without control."[77] Balfour perceived that the role of the moral tutor in Hume's system is not the philosopher or the minister, but the individual's own passions.

Balfour complained that Hume did not provide any tools—other than a weak consideration of advantage—by which to promote the habitual, reliable, and consistent subordination of the private to the public welfare, which Balfour construed as the essence of morality. How, Balfour supposed, could service to one's passions lead to service of the public good?[78] What Balfour did not recognize is that Hume recommended *institutional* controls as a replacement for *philosophical* or *religious* controls on the passions. Hume thought Christian and classical philosophical strategies to govern the passions only served to heighten an individual's anxiety regarding the rightness or wrongness of his actions. Institutional controls, on the other hand, enabled individuals to pursue happiness however they saw fit without the pressures that come from trying to live up to some high-flying standard of virtue. And he supposed that this freedom to pursue happiness

in one's own way would produce some level of zeal in defense of law and government, which secures public order, thereby making this individual freedom possible. This is Hume's system for transforming the individual's pursuit of self-interest into sympathy for the public interest.

This strategy requires a public stance of nonjudgmentalism. This nonjudgmental stance follows from a prior judgment condemning all who propound a rigorous code of moral and spiritual rectitude as a potential basis for law. Balfour aptly said that Hume's "scheme of morality is, in effect, no other than the antient [that is, Epicurean] scheme which excluded religion," which defines "virtue" as traits conducive to pleasure, or happiness. In other words, Hume "introduced the virtues as subordinate ministers to the happiness proposed," that is, "self-love and immediate enjoyment."[79]

Hume's liberal political perspective, which alleges to promote the good of all, is built upon a particular view of the good, of virtue, and of happiness that, as Reid and Balfour contended, is essentially Epicurean. For Hume, as for Bentham and other liberals after him, a liberal regime must implement this Epicurean view—and not the competing Stoic or Christian ones, for example—in law in order to maintain a system of liberty, toleration, and pluralism that, together, constitutes "the good of all." This is far from a "strictly political" approach to political life, relying as it does on a detailed moral anatomy and a specific moral code derived from a contestable conception of the human person, happiness, and the good.

## THE INPUT OF HUME'S POLITICAL SCIENCE: SELF-LOVE

Hume expressly denied that self-love is the motive guiding all human action, but he maintained that, for his institutional formula for channeling self-love toward the public good to work, all that is needed as an input is self-love. This may be surprising since, as Lord Kames acknowledged, Hume "is more cautious than the French writers, who reject every principle but self-love."[80] Interestingly, Robert Clayton (1695–1758), a bishop from Ireland, adopted the unusual position of criticizing Hume for *not* reducing morals to self-love. Nevertheless, Clayton inventively used one of Hume's own principles to argue that Hume, too, in spite of himself, elaborated a selfish system of morals. Drawing from the second *Enquiry*, Clayton recounted Hume's principle that an individual does not regard distant na-

tions as highly as one's own. Similarly, the individual consults the good of her own community over the general interest of mankind. And the individual values the good of her family over the good of her own community. Clayton, by taking this principle further, all the way down to the individual level, concluded that the individual clearly prefers her own good over the good of others. Clayton mischievously concluded that Hume's system was as selfish as Hobbes's or Mandeville's, since it showed "the use of self-love in the particular persons of which that society is composed: the interest and advantage of which is better consulted by every one taking care of himself, than by any loose indeterminate views of public good."[81]

Clayton was wrong to suppose that the selfish principle pervades every aspect of Hume's moral system. But he was correct to assert that Hume's political science, which was grounded upon uniform, regular principles of human action, assumed that individuals would be motivated not by the public interest, but by their own interest. The individual, driven by self-love, is concerned with his own temporal well-being more than the good of others. This is the law of human behavior, the "natural" law on which Hume's political theorizing proceeds, that the conventions of justice and government need to assume in order to carry out their magic of turning the input of self-interest into the output of the public good. The individual need not intend the public good to contribute to it. This is the essence of what Adam Smith would later describe as the operation of the "invisible hand." And it is the centerpiece of Hume's political thought.

To conceive of politics as a science, one must elaborate general principles of cause and effect in public affairs. Hume arrived at self-love, or knavery, as the stable, general, and predictable passion that is the basic cause explaining human action in the public political sphere. In the essay "Of the Independency of Parliament," he examined the growing wealth and power of the Crown that threatened to distort the balance of power within the British constitution. There, he declared as a fundamental maxim of political science that "every man ought to be supposed a knave, and to have no other end, in all his actions than private interest" (E-IP 42).[82] Despite acknowledging the presence of original principles in human nature other than self-love, including gratitude and generosity, Hume adopted as the core principle of his political science something that he admitted was true in theory, but false in fact, namely, that everyone is a knave, a self-seeker intent on private gain and advancement. As Hume stated in

the *Treatise*, the miracle of modernity is the process by which the self-love "of one person" that is "naturally contrary to that of another" is manipulated, so that "these several interested passions are oblig'd to adjust themselves after such a manner as to concur in some system of conduct and behavior" (T 3.2.6.6).

The pursuit of private gain, expressed beyond the confines of the conventions of justice and government, causes individuals to act harmfully, "in contradiction to their known interest" (T 3.2.7.3). This pursuit of private gain is expressed in unregulated, partial passions, including love, anger, avarice, and ambition. We love those who benefit us. We hate those who slight us. We seek an endless flow of material benefits for ourselves and our associates. And we strive for ever more power.

These partial affections cause chaos in man's natural state. And they have no cure. They cannot be removed, or mastered, by sheer personal effort, by a strict regimen of moral reform or by spiritual regeneration. Neither philosophy nor grace can conquer them: "Love or anger, ambition or avarice, have their root in the temper and affections, which the soundest reason is scarce ever able fully to correct" (E-Su 579). When describing greed in "Of Avarice," Hume observed that, although moralists and philosophers rail against this vice, "we hardly find a single instance of any person's being cured of it" (E-Av 571).

Since politics is based on these incurable passions, politics is susceptible to scientific study. Hume also tried to subject the rise of the arts and sciences to scientific study. But he was less successful. It is more difficult to find uniform principles explaining, for example, why certain cultures produce genius—such as the poetic genius of Ovid, Virgil, and Lucretius—and others do not. In the essay "Of Eloquence," Hume observed that there is no clear answer for why the British, though they possessed a free government, did not produce exceptional orators like Demosthenes and Cicero, who arose in the ancient republics of Greece and Rome. There is no clear answer because the sentiments, manners, and understandings of various people across time differ "by education and example." Nevertheless, Hume professed that "*civil* history" possesses "a much greater uniformity than in the history of learning and science." Philosophy, arts, sciences, customs, and manners shift from age to age and from people to people. But politics is remarkably similar from age to age, because of the ineradicable passions that drive it. "Interest and ambition, honour and shame, friendship and enmity, gratitude and revenge, are the prime movers in all public

transactions," Hume wrote, "and these passions are of a very stubborn and intractable nature" (E-El 97).

Hume suggested in "Of the Origin of Government" that the inability to surrender present, "often very frivolous temptations" to the distant interest, namely, the public good, is a "great weakness . . . incurable in human nature." It is the role of government to keep men, as far as possible, "in the paths of justice." For this reason, it is proper for magistrates "to punish transgressors, to correct fraud and violence, and to oblige men, however reluctant, to consult their own real and permanent interests" (E-OG 38). As Hume stated in the *Treatise*, government in a civilized society "force[s] [people] to seek their own advantage, by a concurrence in some common end or purpose." By coordinating joint projects, which are difficult to carry out because of the division of labor and competing private interests, "bridges are built; harbours opened; ramparts raised; canals formed; fleets equipped; and armies disciplined" (T 3.2.7.8).

The primary motive to which the government appeals to accomplish these common ends, or purposes, in Hume's system, is self-interest, or the desire for advantage. In "Of the Independency of Parliament," Hume argued that a constitution that distributes power among "several orders of men" and considers "the separate interest of . . . each order" will be "wise and happy" (E-IP 42). This is why Hume fretted about the shifting balance of power between the House of Commons and the Crown. The doctrine of separation of powers suitably checks the ambition of political leaders, of various orders or factions, so it is less likely that they can abuse their power. In the same way, he supposed that commerce, made possible by the rules of justice, provided a safe outlet for avarice and ambition in common life when individuals realize they can gain by playing within the rules of the system. Politics and economics, each, then, rely on the assumption that each man is a knave. Consequently, it is by "this [private] interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good" (E-IP 42).

The appeal made to citizens to persuade them to cooperate for the public good is self-interest, not love or virtue. Some of Hume's contemporaries, such as Balfour, criticized him for downplaying natural benevolence. He acknowledged that benevolence is a virtue, but he thought its effect was weak. Natural benevolence does little, if anything, to fit us for large society, outside familial or tribal units. Selfishness and artifice are needed to fit us for large, lasting societies.

And this means that Hume's political system requires no prepolitical moral rectitude. It calls for no spiritual discipline. It relies neither on charity nor on sacrifice for the public good, but on the desire for material gain. The pursuit of private advantage—specifically through material gain—within the scheme of justice molds the character of the individual, making it agreeable and useful for oneself and one's peers. For this reason, John B. Stewart wrote that for Hume, "the primary relationship, beyond the [private, that is, familial] scope of love, is economic; therefore, the universal order is economic, not political or religious."[83] Government in a commercial society must reflect this universal order and supply economic motives where they might be absent. Peace and prosperity produce good morals. Schabas and Wennerlind capture this mentality by emphasizing that Hume "foregrounds the institutions of property, markets, and money as the best means to develop and safeguard moral improvement."[84]

As an example of a time in which Hume thought it suitable for the government to promote ambition, avarice, and industry where it was lacking, it is helpful to consider his interpretation of the Enclosure Acts, which put an end to the open field system and fenced off for private use land that was formerly held in common. Hume defended these acts because they promoted industry rather than idleness. Schabas and Wennerlind write that Hume "strongly supported" the Enclosure Acts "and the harsh measures necessary for their execution."[85] And he did so, primarily, because these accorded with his theory of human betterment, according to which individuals, by being made more industrious, by either force or necessity, are made to pursue their true interests. Hume explained the Enclosure Acts, particularly those enforced prior to Kett's Rebellion in 1549, in the following manner: "A great demand arose for wool both abroad and at home: Pasturage was found more profitable than unskillful tillage: Whole estates were laid waste by inclosures: The tenants regarded as a useless burden, were expelled their habitations: Even the cottagers, deprived of the commons, on which they formerly fed their cattle were reduced to misery: And a decay of people, as well as a diminution of the former plenty, was remarked in the kingdom" (HIST 3:369).

Though the poor complained about the loss of common lands, Hume argued that the "encrease of industry"—which the poor would have to exhibit in order to earn a living after enclosure—was "an effect beneficial to society." He claimed that it was "difficult for the people to shake off their

former habits of indolence; and nothing but necessity could compel them to such an exertion of their faculties" (HIST 3:370). Inculcating a spirit of industry among the people was advantageous, since an "industrious tradesman," according to Hume, "is both a better man and a better citizen" than an idle commoner (HIST 3:76). As a result, he lauded the effects of the Enclosure Acts, which drew more people toward profitable pursuits as merchants and wage-earners in urban areas. This move to the cities—spurred on by political decision-making and sustained for two centuries—added to the middling rank of men that worked to improve their condition and socialized in groups such as the Society for the Improving Arts and Sciences, a group to which Hume belonged, and that, in this way, fostered industry and happiness.[86]

Classical republican theorists worried that by governing people in such a manner—appealing to their private appetites and interested affections, rather than the disinterested love of the public good—the public might sacrifice that valor, that public spirit, that readiness to sacrifice the private to the public good necessary for communal well-being. Hume, in the first two essays of the *Political Discourses*, "Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts," argued that a focus on industry, rather than agriculture, on foreign trade, rather than war, would add to the nation's stock of labor and contribute to the nation's prominence on the international stage. Economic growth, moreover, could be used to fuel the state's war apparatus whenever necessary. As a result, the civic republican ideal of small, self-governing communities of frugal farmers who, in times of necessity, form citizen militias proved dated and dispensable.[87] Furthermore, Hume argued that the Spartan self-discipline on which this civic republican ideal relied was an "ancient policy [that] was violent, and contrary to the more natural and usual course of things." In the old days, a "continual succession of wars" made "every citizen a soldier" (E-Co 259). In the modern age, though, as Smith would later state in *The Wealth of Nations*, "Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society." The Spartan principles of old, like the Socratic cardinal virtues or the Christian theological virtues, "are," for Hume, "too disinterested and too difficult to support." As a result, "it is requisite to govern men by other passions, and animate them with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury." This complies with "the natural bent of the mind" (E-Co 263).

## HUME'S PROJECT OF PUBLIC ENLIGHTENMENT

Hume, who praised commercial society for inaugurating the reign of humanity, replaced faith in divine providence with faith in a kind of economic teleology. It is no coincidence that scholarly and popular writers alike refer to the vast change for the better in standards of living over the past few centuries as the "miracle" of modernity.[88] Deirdre McCloskey, for instance, credits this "great enrichment" to ideas, specifically to the rhetorical victory of bourgeois values, including equality, liberty, and industry. This bourgeois "ideology," as McCloskey calls it, encouraged—and provided the framework for—human betterment, both material and moral, achieved principally by means of commercial activity.[89] Hume, perhaps even more than Adam Smith, is the preeminent defender of the liberal belief system that calls for faith, not in divine providence, but in the social, political, and economic institutions that gave rise to the modern miracle of human advancement.

Such a belief system—and its corresponding way of life—needs to be put into practice for it to be efficacious. This commercial attitude must be adopted and translated into policy by public actors. In Thomas Merrill's words, "political life needs to be educated and 'guided' by philosophy or enlightenment."[90] Perhaps this is one reason—other than the literary fame it garnered him—that Hume was happy to see his *Political Discourses* enthusiastically acclaimed, read by leaders in business, trade, and government, and translated into multiple languages.[91]

Hume sought to enlighten his readers—literate men and women in polite society, those who conversed in coffee shops, inns, taverns, and public gardens—to purge the irrational attitudes that threatened to undermine public order in Great Britain by stoking faction and fanaticism.[92] As Smith wrote in his description of Hume's last days, Hume endeavored "to open the eyes of the public" (L 2:451).

Hume's target audience was the middling ranks, which he saw as a bulwark for a new kind of politics.[93] He believed that this burgeoning middle class constituted the "most numerous rank of men, that can be suppos'd susceptible of philosophy; and therefore, all discourses of morality ought principally to be address'd to them" (E-MSL 546). Marc Hanvelt has described Hume's *Essays* as a "political act" designed both to change minds and to exemplify the kind of polite rhetoric by which to reform opinion in

a pluralist democracy.[94] Indeed, Hume employed the witty, moderate, soundly argued speech that he thought appropriate to polite society, in order to achieve a particular purpose, namely, to communicate his political science to the broadening middle class, which he believed to be the most secure basis for a politics of public liberty, one founded not on superstition or speculative metaphysics, but on Hume's "sound philosophy" and its recognition of the benefits of industry.

As Merrill remarks, Hume's "case for commerce . . . requires a cultural revolution," a reshaping of moral and political thought on the ground.[95] The achievement of this kind of radical reform of public opinion would have been an impressive feat in eighteenth-century Great Britain where theological and civic republican ideals were still broadly held by Tories and Country Whigs. Hume seems to have supposed that a cultural revolution of this kind could sustain a more long-term "political revolution."[96] As Stewart explained, Hume's desired empowerment of the industrious business class called for "a new social structure, together with a constitution appropriate to that social structure."[97] Hume located in the middle classes a growing station of individuals susceptible to his brand of sound philosophy and capable, eventually, of wielding power in public affairs in a transformative way.[98] Hume's approach to politics, then, required not only taking the human mind as it is but shaping the human mind with particular moral, cultural, and political ends in view.

This interpretation is consistent with Hume's methodological approach as outlined in the essay "Of Essay Writing."[99] Here, he claimed that he would, as a scientist of human nature, by means of experience and observation, use the resources of common life to "manufacture" a system of philosophy that he would subsequently market to the conversable classes as a useful and agreeable system of thought free of superstition. By popularizing such a system by means of his *Essays*, Hume thought he might educate the inhabitants of polite society in a way that his dense *Treatise* never could, in order to end the "separation of the learned from the conversible world [that] seems to have been the great defect of the last age" (E-EW 534). Thus, he was both a "scientific explainer of social order," as Russell Hardin aptly recounted, and a purveyor of ideas congenial to social order.[100]

"The chief business of philosophers," according to Hume, "is "to regard the general course of things." This is also, he acknowledged, "the chief business of politicians; especially in the domestic government of the state,

where the public good, which is, or ought to be their object, depends on the concurrence of a multitude of causes." Hume's *Essays* popularized a scientific approach to public affairs written not only to correct false beliefs and garner literary fame for the author, but also to persuade public decision-makers, particularly in the rising middling ranks, that the "greatness of a state, and the happiness of its subjects . . . are . . . inseparable with regard to commerce" (E-Co 254–55). Hume pointed to the benefits of a commercial way of life and the inadequacies—and even dangers—of Christian and Stoic ways of life.[101]

According to Hume, commercial society, undergirded by the rule of law, is the best means by which to produce the "indissoluble chain" of industry, knowledge, and humanity, which leads to greater prosperity, enlarged sociability, and advancement in the arts and sciences, combined with lower levels of superstition, all of which, according to Hume, are useful for advancing human happiness, which is the aim of artificial conventions (E-RA 270–71). Hume, then, began with experience, devised a theory, and engaged in a project of public enlightenment, designed to shape public opinion and to generate consensus on the shared ends of public political life and the means by which to attain them. As Neil McArthur has convincingly argued, Hume judged a regime's merits by its ability to promote civilization over the forces of barbarism.[102] A civilized regime, one that is humane and just, depends on a civilized belief system. And a civilized belief system is what Hume sought to articulate.

## A HUMEAN PARADOX

Hume acknowledged that the axiom of his political science, that everyone is a knave, is true in politics but false in fact. Hume wrote in the first *Enquiry* that human beings are actually motivated by a broad range of passions, including "ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit" (EHU 8.7). He thought it necessary, though, in order to turn politics into a science, to rely on this general principle that every human being is a knave, because of its explanatory and predictive power.[103] He defended this view, in "Of the Independency of Parliament," by arguing that even when individuals act cooperatively in the political realm, they typically do so in factions, which pervert the moral sentiment by causing them to subordinate the public interest to the partial interest of their political party.

If institutions of civilized society are built on the expectation that human beings will behave knavishly, then it is necessary for individuals to remain at least somewhat knavish in order to sustain those institutions. And if a dose of knavishness must be infused into each person, in order for the conventions of justice and government to accomplish their alchemy of transforming the pursuit of private interest into public good, this seems to call for the imposition of a political axiom, which Hume called "false in *fact*" (E-IP 42), onto existing political reality. And this assumption, though admittedly false in fact, colors all evaluations and prescriptions that derive from a Humean political science.

Hume's political thought, like his predecessors', centers on the transition from barbarism to civilization, achieved by means of useful artifices agreed upon by self-interested agents in order to increase private enjoyment. It looks to artifice rather than nature or supernature for salvation. It defines salvation in despiritualized, that is, this-worldly, terms. This vision of the origin and end of society, which situates the liberal way of life, is liberalism's founding myth.

This liberal vision is presented in book 3 of Hume's *Treatise*. And it informs his *Essays* and *History of England*. Yet his *Essays* and *History of England* earned him a reputation for conservatism in his later years. Contemporary commentators, in fact, have referred to Hume's *History* as the source of modern conservatism, because of its influence among thinkers on the French Right in the early days of the French Revolution. Hume's influence on French traditionalists may have been greater even than that of Edmund Burke.

Hume, however, was no traditionalist. Conservatives are inclined to praise Hume's skeptical wariness of innovation in political life and his preference for slow, gradual alterations to the political order, but his political thought dispensed with Christian and classical metaphysical foundations. As a result, his political thought, which is modern in character, is only "conservative" to the extent that it promotes gradual change rather than rapid alteration. This is perhaps one reason why Sir Leslie Stephen referred to Hume's political theory as "a cynical conservatism," which sides with "authority" and is favorable to "stagnation." Hume, like Hobbes and Mandeville before him, dismantled what Stephen called "the old theological and metaphysical synthesis" that is the product of the Western tradition.[104] Hume's modern variety of conservatism is at odds with this kind of traditionalism.

Modern conservatives have claimed Hume as one of their own, but so have modern liberals. And that is because his potent political vision, presented with inimitable flair, captured the modern political imagination, serving as a touchstone for both the Left and Right as they emerged in the later years of the eighteenth century and beyond. "Realist" or "conservative" admirers of Hume laud him for trying to "decrease the role of theory itself in the philosophical understanding of politics," but they overlook the way in which theory remained as central to Hume's vision as it did to French *philosophes* and to nineteenth-century British liberals.[105] Hume's strategy of reform may have differed from theirs—he consistently opposed rapid and violent formulas for political change—but the liberal, even progressive cast of his conception of justice and society may have been his most lasting contribution to the modern political imagination. And that is the subject of chapter 5.

PART 3

# The Modern Political Imagination

FIVE

# Conservatizing Liberalism

Hume, in the words of Sheldon Wolin, "alter[ed] the future course of both liberalism and conservatism."[1] Bentham and Mill acknowledged that their respective versions of utilitarian liberalism were indebted to Hume's writings on utility, but thinkers on the French Right turned to Hume during the French Revolution to highlight the dangers of trying to remake society in accord with the dictates of radical ideology. Both post-Enlightenment "liberals" and "conservatives," then, have drawn inspiration from Hume's texts. Hume certainly did not understand himself as a "liberal" or "conservative," but it is possible to locate elements of his writings that shaped the outlook to which future, self-proclaimed "liberals" and "conservatives" subscribed.

This chapter will explore, first, the conservative elements of Hume's political thought. This will consist of an examination of his (1) defense of Great Britain's mixed monarchy and the parties to which it gave rise, (2) late-in-life stance prioritizing authority over liberty, and (3) analysis of custom and opinion in common life. Next, this chapter will explore the liberal elements of Hume's political thought. This will consist of an examination of his progressive narrative of civilizational development and interpretations of his *History* as a revisionist work designed to produce a

revolution in opinion. This chapter will conclude with an explanation of how Hume can be described as conservative only by changing what conservatism is, that is, by redefining it in light of a liberal vision of justice and society.

Since conservative interpreters of Hume emphasize his more empirical and historical writings, that is, the *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* and the *History of England*, this chapter will focus on these works, which were bestsellers in Hume' day. These writings seem to tell a story more than they divulge a theory.[2] It is true that Hume was an elegant, learned, and celebrated author of history. It is one of the reasons he helped shape the modern political imagination. There is no way, however, to separate his narrative of social development in the *Essays* and the *History* from his more theoretical writing in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries*. These works form part of the same philosophical project, which is founded upon the science of man Hume articulated in the *Treatise*.

There is no doubt that Hume shared in the Enlightenment project of turning the study of politics into a science. This was a liberal project, a predecessor to the liberal projects of Bentham and Mill. Hume's alleged conservatism, then, does not offer a fundamentally different *outlook* on morals and politics than the one presented by Bentham and Mill. They wrote in the same idiom. Hume's political thought differed in its prescriptions, insofar as it recommended a slower pace of political change, for example. But essentially what a Humean political philosophy "conserves" is the vision of justice and society contained in the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Bayle, Mandeville, and the self-described liberals who followed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## HUMEAN CONSERVATISM, PART 1: DEFENSE OF THE ESTABLISHED CONSTITUTION

Hume's defense of the limited monarchy in Great Britain seems to flow from a conservative disposition. After all, Hume was pessimistic that the people of Great Britain could establish a form of government any better than the one they had. And he certainly did not think they could produce an ideal form of government in their minds and make it work out there, in the real world.

Hume supposed that conflict was a regular feature of politics. He thought the conflicts between the parties might be tempered, but he denied that conflicts between parties, at least in Great Britain, would ever go away. Hume, like Machiavelli, presented himself not as an armchair philosopher, theorizing about imaginary republics, but as a historically minded anatomist of political society, who takes human beings as they are and not as he would like them to be.

In his well-known treatment of party politics, Hume harshly criticized the speculative principles of Whigs and Tories, who adhered to arcane theories about the origin, nature, and purpose of government. He suggested that parties such as these, which he called parties "from *principle*, especially abstract speculative principle, are known only to modern times, and are, perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable *phænomenon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs" (E-PG 60).

Hume argued that parties of principle threaten civil war. They encourage debate over the first principles of government. Such debates, though, never cease "to confound and distract . . . government." They lead zealous political combatants to try to align the law with their respective interpretations of the constitutional order (E-PGB 69). Perceiving the dangers posed by parties of principle, Hume acted as a myth-buster, debunking the popular theories of government that gave rise to the contentious political environment in Great Britain. His attacks on the speculative party principles of Whigs and Tories pervade his *Essays* and *History*.

In his *Essays*, Hume, who applied the principles of his political science to the politics of his day, provided the following explanation for the existence of the parties of Great Britain. First, as he stated in his last essay, "Of the Origin of Government" (1777), government consists of a balance between liberty and authority. These opposing forces are continually at odds with one another. Each vies for supremacy. And the party divide in British politics reflected these forces.

Hume suggested that, beyond the general opposition between authority and liberty inherent in the nature of government, there are both psychological and constitutional reasons for the party divide in Great Britain. Psychologically, as Hume explained in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" (1741), there is a natural temperament favoring authority. This *superstitious* temperament, which one might discover in High Churchmen, whether Anglican or Catholic, makes individuals submissive,

particularly to priestly authority. *Enthusiasm*, on the other hand, makes one bold and intrepid, so that, like the radical Puritans of seventeenth-century England, one might think he can communicate with the Deity freely, directly, without a priestly intermediary. Hume observed "*that superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it*" (E-SE 78).[3] Party distinctions derived not only from the temperament of individuals, but also from the constitution of Great Britain. The British constitution, as Hume explained in "Of the Parties of Great Britain" (1741), contained a monarchical aspect, representing authority, and a republican aspect, representing liberty. The divide between the parties, then, was rooted in human nature, in the nature of the constitution, and in the nature of government itself.

If Whigs and Tories could only recognize their true origins in human nature and in the constitution, then British politics would be less volatile. But as long as the parties bickered about first principles, Hume thought they would refuse to compromise and damage the integrity of the constitution. For this reason, he recommended that the parties view themselves not as vehicles for enforcing principle, but as vehicles for furthering shared interests.

In the 1741 essay "Of Parties in General," Hume signaled that the best way to manage the conflicts between the parties is to keep their attention on interest, because parties of principle generate vociferous contestation, particularly when religion is involved. Hume remarked that "parties of religion are more furious and enraged than the most cruel factions that ever arose from interest and ambition" (E-PG 63). Hume believed that one reason British politics were so heated is that religion remained part of the equation. But, as Hume observed in his *Essays*, leaders of religious and political factions, alike, reliably pursue their own interests, even when their followers believe these factions are based on principle (E-PG 62; E-PGB 65). The reality that these parties act, in fact, as parties of interest made it possible for Hume to think that the religious aspects of the factions would eventually decline, leaving interest as the primary element, thereby making politics more predictable, more manageable, and more susceptible to scientific investigation.

In his analysis of the Whigs and the Tories—and their respective histories—Hume indicated that the political and religious principles dividing the parties were subordinated, in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, to their shared interest in preserving the British constitution. Whereas

moderate political actors resolved the controversy leading up to the bloodless Glorious Revolution, the party radicals had prevailed earlier that century, producing as a result the devastating English civil wars. Hume looked back at "the great rebellion" to gain a more thorough understanding of the nature of the parties, those of Court and Country, which appeared as Cavalier and Roundhead during the great rebellion and as Tory and Whig thereafter (E-PGB 67).

The "great rebellion" occurred under Charles I (1600–1649; r. 1625–49). In 1640, he called a new Parliament, requesting its support for his war against Scotland. Eleven years earlier, he had dissolved Parliament over a dispute about church policy and taxation. Parliament's refusal to support the king's war against Scotland in 1640 produced an extended conflict. Charles I finally submitted to many of Parliament's demands as the Scottish army advanced into England.[4] With the onset of civil war in 1642, two parties formed, the Cavaliers, who were the king's friends, later called Tories, and the Roundheads, who were the Parliament's friends, later called Whigs.

The party divide had a religious component. Cavaliers supported the political power of the monarch and the religious power of the established church. Roundheads backed the political power of Parliament and the religious power of the Presbyterians. For the most part, the Cavaliers were Anglicans; the Roundheads were Presbyterians. Rigid Tories, though, despite being Anglican, preferred Catholicism to Presbyterianism. Roundheads, meanwhile, who championed the call for toleration issued by Quakers, Anabaptists, and Independents, were intensely anti-Catholic.

Radicals and moderates inhabited each of the parties. Radical Cavaliers, such as Bishop Laud, advocated for absolute monarchy and the elimination of Parliament. Moderate Cavaliers, though they sought to enhance the power of the king, ultimately wanted to maintain a balanced constitution. On the other side, the radical Roundheads vowed to end the monarchy, while moderates merely aimed to prevent abuses of royal prerogative. As Hume remarked, "The pretensions of the Parliament, if yielded to, broke the balance of the constitution, by rendering the government almost entirely republican" (E-PGB 68). This occurred when the radicals in Parliament prevailed, establishing the Commonwealth (1649–60) after the execution of Charles I.

With the Restoration of monarchy (1660) under Charles II (1630–85; r. 1660–85), Hume wrote that "new parties arose, under the appellation of

*Whig* and *Tory*, which have continued ever since to confound and distract our government" (E-PGB 68). Charles II had joined France, a monarchical and Catholic nation, in a war against Holland, a republican and Protestant nation. This, along with Charles II's Royal Declaration of Indulgence (1672), which extended religious liberty to Protestant nonconformists and Roman Catholics, agitated the Country party. Fearing the rise of an arbitrary, Catholic government, the Country party, which dominated the House of Commons, passed a series of bills to exclude the Catholic James, Duke of York, from succeeding his brother, Charles II, as king. The House of Lords, however, which was under the control of the Court party, blocked these measures. The appellations Whig and Tory were attached to the Country and Court parties, respectively, during this Exclusion Crisis (1679–81).

James II (1633–1701; r. 1685–88) granted full liberty of conscience to Catholics and Dissenters by means the Declaration of Indulgence (1687). Chagrined by this policy, Protestant leaders in Parliament invited William of Orange (1650–1702), James II's son-in-law, to England to ensure a Protestant, rather than Catholic succession. When James II realized he would not prevail in an impending armed conflict, he fled to France, after which the Convention Parliament, interpreting the flight as an abdication, offered the crown to William and Mary (1662–94).

The Tories, the Court party that had endorsed submission to the monarch, had united with the Whigs in Parliament to bestow the crown on William and Mary. And this, for Hume, served as proof that interest prevails over principle, since the Tories sacrificed their doctrine of passive obedience to the monarch to maintain the constitutional order and the established religion of Great Britain. "The Tories, as men," Hume contended, "were enemies to arbitrary power. Their zeal for liberty, was, perhaps, less fervent than that of their antagonists; but was sufficient to make them forget all their general principles, when they saw themselves openly threatened with a subversion of the ancient government" (E-PG 70). Hume defined the postrevolution parties in the following manner: "A Tory, therefore, since the *revolution*, may be defined in a few words, to be *a lover of monarchy, though without abandoning liberty; and a partisan of the family of* Stuart. As a Whig may be defined to be *a lover of liberty though without renouncing monarchy; and a friend to the settlement in the* Protestant *line*" (E-PGB 71).

According to Hume, moderate actors cooperated to bring about the Glorious Revolution, for which reason both Tories and Whigs remained devoted to the constitutional system of liberty. His early essays on party defended this postrevolution settlement and called for moderation rather than party animosity. He wrote, though, during the era of Whig supremacy, at a time when the spirit of party that had roiled British politics earlier in the century was on the decline and Tories were on the outside looking in.

Although Queen Anne (1665–1714; r. 1702–14), James II's daughter, had Tory sympathies, her ministry was mixed, like her predecessor William III's. The Act of Settlement (1701) established that Anne's nearest Protestant relative would inherit the throne. From 1710 to 1714, the Tory administration maneuvered to prevent the elector of Hanover from succeeding Queen Anne. The Tories also moved to require membership in the Church of England for anyone seeking state office. The Tories achieved this aim by means of the Occasional Conformity Act (1711), which the Whig administration of 1718–19 reversed. With the inauguration of Hanoverian rule (George I, 1660–1727; r. 1714–27), the era of Whig supremacy began. And only moderate Tories would attain leadership positions in these years.

Perhaps the most influential party analyst in the 1730s, before Hume authored his essays, was Lord Bolingbroke (1678–1751), a member of the Tory ministry (1710–14) who fled from Britain six months after George I ascended to the throne. Bolingbroke remained in exile until 1723. Upon his return, he was prevented from retaking his seat in the House of Lords because of his support for the Jacobite rising of 1715. Along with William Pultney, Bolingbroke started the journal *The Craftsman*, which vehemently opposed the Court Whigs under the leadership of Sir Robert Walpole, first lord of the treasury (1721–42), who is recognized as England's first prime minister.

According to Bolingbroke's party analysis, the old distinction between Whig and Tory had succumbed to a new, purer division between Court and Country. Bolingbroke, who portrayed the Country party as the opposition party, charged the Court party with corruption. Walpole's Court Whigs benefited from a proliferation of government offices, because of Walpole's pursuit of the Crown's patronage. Bolingbroke condemned this dependence of Parliament on the Crown, which he described as a perversion of the ancient constitution. Furthermore, whereas Bolingbroke's

Country party supported the landed and trading interest, Walpole's Court party favored the moneyed interest, whose influence in government vastly expanded after the financial revolution of the 1690s. The Court Whigs, who approved of these financial innovations, supported the standing army; Bolingbroke's Country party pressed for a citizen militia and strong navy.[5] Bolingbroke lamented the loss of civic virtue and the rise of luxury and corruption, which he interpreted as a sure recipe for decline. The Court party, meanwhile, presented itself as the preserver of the Glorious Revolution, the Act of Settlement, and the Hanoverian succession, and presented the opposing Country party as a set of republican and Jacobite extremists threatening the postrevolution settlement.

Hume's early essays on party, written between 1739 and 1741, contested Bolingbroke's views on several levels. Most fundamentally, Hume disagreed with Bolingbroke's thesis that the Tory/Whig distinction was no longer relevant and that the Court/Country split was the only one that mattered. Hume averred that some "seem inclined to think, that the difference [between Whig and Tory] is now abolished, and that affairs are so far returned to their natural state, that there are at present no other parties among us but *court* and *country*; that is, men, who, by interest or principle, are attached either to monarchy or liberty" (E-PGB 72). But Hume contended that religion continued to inject confusion into political life, because, in an odd turn of events, the Dissenters were siding with the Court Whigs, whereas the clergy in the Church of England were siding with the Country party. This unexpected swap of allegiances provided further evidence, for Hume, that religion is a source of confusion and irregularity, throwing the balance of the constitution, and its parties, off-kilter.

Hume, moreover, challenged Bolingbroke's charge that the Court Whigs under Walpole were guilty of corruption. Walpole sought—and gained—the favor of the Crown for the advantage of his fellow Court Whigs. Because the House of Commons had been poised to become the dominant element of the constitution, Hume thought it appropriate for the Crown to assert its authority and extend its ambitions to offset the growing strength of the House of Commons. These actions testified to the regular manner in which the different parts of the constitutional order—the Crown, House of Lords, and House of Commons—competed with one another, creating new arrangements leading to stability in the process. The grasping for power made politics more predictable.

Hume's essay "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science" (1741) rendered his main point clearly: the best form of government is not whatever is administered best, as Alexander Pope suggested in *An Essay on Man*; the best form of government is that which is properly balanced. Political stability does not derive from something as unpredictable and wavering as an individual's character, but from properly structured institutions. It is for this reason that Hume mocked the lionizing of Walpole by the Court party and the demonizing of Walpole by the Country party. In response to the Country party, Hume suggested that, if the British constitution were as excellent as they supposed, then the character of one person, even a prime minister, could not cause the whole constitutional fabric to unravel during one term in office. And if the constitution were bad, then they should have expected a Walpolean governor, just as a man who marries a prostitute should expect to be cheated on.

An absolute monarchy may depend on the virtue of its administration, but a republic does not. A republic operates on the principle of checks and balances, which channels avarice and ambition to make it "the interest, even of bad men, to act for the public good." Hume argued, "So great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which the mathematical sciences afford us" (E-IP 16). On this scientific basis, Hume declared, "It may therefore be pronounced as an universal axiom in politics, *That an hereditary prince, a nobility without vassals, and a people voting by their representatives, form the best* MONARCHY, ARISTOCRACY, *and* DEMOCRACY" (E-IP 18).

Whereas Hume here expressed immense confidence in a mixed form of government, he had also articulated doubts that the delicate balance of the British constitution could be sustained. The monarchical and democratic parts, for example, were far stronger than the aristocratic part. And if it were not for Walpole's system of patronage, the democratic part of the system would overpower the rest.[6] And Hume, no defender of direct democracy, lamented the way that violent factions regularly disrupted life in a pure republic. As a result, Hume encouraged readers to zealously defend the established government, the institutions of which—far more than the private character of governors—were responsible for securing peace, liberty, and stability in Great Britain.

Hume's encouragement here, however, required a change in his readers. After all, the Whig and Tory parties were speculative parties, built on principle. He portrayed these speculative principles as patently false. To the extent that his polite readers believed these principles, they subscribed to false beliefs. They would have to change their minds about the principles and purposes of the parties if they were going to preserve peace and order in public life. In his 1748 essays, Hume directly confronted the speculative principles of both Whigs and Tories, arguing in effect that the preservation of the established government would require right thinking, or freedom from falsehood. Many readers would have to change their patterns of thought in order to arrive at this kind of sound thinking.

In "Of Passive Obedience," Hume cast doubt on the veracity of the Tory principle of the divine right of kings, according to which all political authority is derived from God and exercised by the monarch. As a result of their endorsement of passive obedience, the Tories advocated not only nonresistance to the monarch but also hereditary succession. Consequently, the Tories, who tended to be High Church Anglicans, were dedicated supporters of the Stuart line of kings. Hume showed little respect for "the religious system" of the Tories, according to which the monarch acts as God's vicegerent (E-PO 488). In earlier essays, Hume had portrayed this false religious belief as a wellspring of a whole litany of "absurd principles," which ultimately sustained the "imaginary rights of princes" (E-PGB 70–71). And he indicated that the Tory myth of divine right kingship had declined because of "the progress of learning and of liberty." He declared that "the clergy have much lost their credit: Their pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed; and even religion can scarcely support itself in the world. The mere name of king commands little respect; and to talk of a king as God's vicegerent on earth, or to give him any of those magnificent titles, which formerly dazzled mankind, would but excite laughter in every one" (E-BG 51).

Hume was equally suspicious of the Whig doctrine of the original contract. Even though Hume admitted in "Of the Original Contract" that, in the beginning, political power was granted by popular consent, he argued that, after the passage of time and necessary changes in leadership, it is positive law, not the original contract, that establishes who has the right to rule. In the British case, for example, long possession favored the Stuarts, but present possession and positive law (the Act of Succes-

sion) favored the Hanoverians. The Whigs had defended their opposition to James II by claiming that he had violated the original contract by abusing royal prerogative and threatening to turn a Protestant nation into a Catholic one, subject to a foreign ruler, the pope. Hume, though a defender of the postrevolution settlement and the Hanoverian succession, which for more than half a century had proven to be a source of stability, supposed the Whigs held the right position, but on the wrong grounds.[7] He thought that the Whigs erred by continuing to preach revolution, which was a cause of disruption, harmful to the preservation of authority that makes liberty possible.[8] And he thought the Tories erred by preaching absolute obedience, which was detrimental to liberty insofar as it promoted servility. Hume targeted the respective sources of these errors—the speculative principles of the parties—not only in the *Essays* but also in the *History of England.*

Hume's "conservative" defense of the British constitution called for a transformation of the popular understanding of the British constitution's origins and ends, which had been influenced by Whig and Tory principles. His *History of England* is polemical and revisionist insofar as it thwarted the Whig theory of original contract and the Tory theory of divine right, enabling Hume to present a new narrative history of the British constitution.[9]

Hume began writing the *History of England* after he had been appointed keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, a position to which he was elected in 1752. He may have taken the post so that he could make use of its resources.[10] He famously wrote the history backward, which is how, Richard Hurd mischievously observed, witches used to say their prayers.[11] *History of the Stuarts* was published in two volumes. The first (1754) covered the reigns of James I (1566–1625; r. 1603–25) and Charles I, and the second (1757) detailed the reigns of Charles II and James II. The next two volumes, *The History of England, Under the House of Tudor*, were released in 1759. The final two volumes, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry VII*, were released in 1762.

In his assault on Whig and Tory mythology, Hume rejected the idea of political nostalgia, that is, any backward-looking political agenda that sought to remain faithful either to a supposed succession of earthly rulers acting on God's behest (the Tory view) or to a supposed original contract

by which men, in a state of equality, distributed political power between Crown and Parliament (the Whig view).[12] This latter narrative was exemplified by Lord Bolingbroke, who, in his *Remarks on the History of England*, supposed that the original plan of government between king, lords, and commons was present in the Saxon constitution. Bolingbroke drew more from the wellspring of civic humanism than Hume did, by arguing that it is necessary for a government to return to its first principles to avoid corruption and decay. "All that can be done, therefore," Bolingbroke declared, "to prolong the duration of a good government, is to draw it back, on every favourable occasion, to the first principles on which it was founded."[13] This meant, for Bolingbroke, recovering the mixed nature of the ancient constitution.[14]

According to Bolingbroke's Country party narrative, the people under both Saxon and Norman kings possessed institutional representation, through which they defended their freedoms against overreach. As a result, the blame for the English civil wars belonged to James I, who had claimed to rule by divine right and, by acting as an absolute monarch, violated the original contract.[15] Hume stated that the appeal to an original plan of the constitution—in the absence of any record of such a contract—betrayed the private ambition of Whig theorists.[16]

Hume also critiqued the interpretation of the Tories and High Churchmen that the English civil wars were caused by the inability of Tudor and early Stuart monarchs, namely, Elizabeth I (1533–1603; r. 1558–1603) and James I, to curb Puritan extremism.[17] Hume insisted that the appeal to divine right kingship was a "pious" fraud designed to advance the position of Tory theorists (HIST 5:93–94). In the end, Hume supposed that Tory and Whig theories alike were imaginative constructs designed to give either the regal or the popular part of government an advantage over the other.

Hume's historical narrative revealed that there was no ancient plan of mixed government to which the country ought to return. Parliament had not been powerful prior to James I's reign. Until then, it had been servile, responsive to the monarch's will.[18] The Stuart monarchs did not innovate, moreover, by ruling absolutely. They governed as the Tudor monarchs had.[19] The spirit of liberty that was planted among Puritans during the rule of Queen Elizabeth I flowered in the age of the Stuarts, helped along by the spirit of commerce that tilted the balance of property toward the

House of Commons. At this time, enthusiasts inspired by both the "manly virtues" of the ancient Greco-Roman authors and religious zeal, adopted republican principles in opposition to the monarchical and Episcopal Court party. The Court party developed their own principles. And here, during the great rebellion, the parties originated. And it was not until the Glorious Revolution that the British constitution became settled. The constitutional balance, according to Hume, did not develop in accord with a rational plan reflecting Whig or Tory principles. The conflict of interest between the parties, rather than the purity of their principles, brought about the present settlement. Thus, "while [the parties] oft threaten the total dissolution of the government, [they] are the real causes of its permanent life and vigour" (HIST 5:556).

Hume's defense of the parties and of the British version of mixed government rested on different principles than those advocated by popular Whig and Tory theorists. Hume dispensed with prominent theories of the original contract, the ancient constitution, and the divine right of kings. And he did not portray political life as a cycle in which corruption is overcome by civic virtue and the restoration of the constitution's first principles.

On this last point, John Brown, who portrayed Mandeville and Hume as "two champions of luxury and effeminacy," harangued Hume. Brown argued that Hume's "political system of self-interest" corrupted Great Britain's political culture.[20] Brown submitted that Hume, by deriving the modern system of liberty from party conflict, devalued the principles of religion, honor, and public spirit, which Brown portrayed as the true sources of political health and well-being. Without religion, honor, and public spirit, Brown supposed, liberty would degenerate into license and anarchy, faction and quarreling.[21] On Brown's account, the pursuit of self-interest over the common good will invariably produce not liberty and stability, as Hume supposed, but "endless dissentions in the state."[22]

Later in his life, even Hume seemed to accept this point, as he railed against fanatical, democratic cries of "liberty!" His defense of governing authority in its conflict with liberty—along with his criticism of the Puritan and Presbyterian spirit of liberty during the great rebellion in his *History of England*—gained him a reputation as a counterrevolutionary among the French Right and as a Tory historian among the British public in the late eighteenth century.

## HUME'S CONSERVATISM, PART 2: DEFENSE OF COUNTERREVOLUTION

From 1763 to 1768, after Hume had completed his *History of England*, he worked in Paris as secretary to Lord Hertford, the ambassador to France. He then worked as secretary to the embassy and chargé d'affaires. After returning to England, Hume worked as undersecretary in the northern department under General Conway. When Hume moved to Edinburgh in August 1769, where he lived out the rest of his days, he devoured political news and opined on contemporary issues.

In Hume's correspondence during this period, he expressed unreserved pessimism about the prospects of Great Britain's delicately balanced constitution. Commenting on how the balance had shifted toward liberty, even licentiousness, he wrote gloomily, facetiously, and hyperbolically about the degeneracy of England's political culture. To Gilbert Elliot, in 1769, Hume confessed: "I am delighted to see the daily and hourly progress of madness and folly and wickedness in England. The consummation of these qualities are the true ingredients for making a fine narrative in history; especially if followed by some signal and ruinous convulsion, as I hope will soon be the case with that pernicious people. He must be a very bad cook indeed, that cannot make a palatable dish from the whole" (L 2:208–9).[23]

Once again, amid the Wilkes and Liberty riots, Hume complained to William Strahan, "Our government has become an absolute chimera: So much liberty is incompatible with human society: And it will be happy, if we can escape from it without falling into a military government, such as Algiers or Tunis" (L 2:209–10). Similarly, Hume declared to Gilbert Elliot in 1770, "Our government has become a chimera; and is too perfect in point of liberty, for so vile a beast as an Englishman, who is a man, a bad animal too, corrupted by above a century of licentiousness. . . . The fatal effects of licentiousness must first be made palpable, by some extreme mischief, resulting from it" (L 2:216).

There is some cynicism evident in the conservatism of his sunset years. Hume, who essentially had reduced the task of government to the promotion of material welfare by means of commerce, who had in many ways connected pleasure with the consumption of goods, and who had thought sound institutions could serve as a substitute for classical virtue,

subsequently complained that the people were intemperate, avaricious, and ambitious, to the degree that they might destroy the balance of the British constitution. This is a strange complaint, since Hume had credited the creation of the mixed constitution to the avarice and ambition of political actors. He then bemoaned such displays of avarice and ambition that seemed to have been normalized in politics and business, alike. Despite laying the philosophical groundwork for explaining the institutional channeling of what were traditionally called vices to public benefits, Hume, near the end of his life, accused Lord North (1732–92), the prime minister (1770–82), of failing to deal more harshly with "the London mob" with its cries of "liberty!" (L 2:244–45). In light of remarks such as this, which are illustrative of the conservative disposition of the mature Hume, Jacques Pierre Brissot (1754–93), a Girondin leader during the French Revolution who was decapitated in Paris in 1793, accused Hume of having too little fervor for the cause of liberty. Brissot suggested this was the case because Hume was more of an "apologist of luxury" than an apologist of liberty, someone who "as a recipient of pensions and great income . . . enjoyed drinking champagne and living the Epicurean life."[24]

Hume may have articulated a progressive view of history, as will be explained later in this chapter. But his view of progress was not the same as that of the French *philosophes*. His despondency about the course of British politics in the wake of the Wilkes riots led him to resist the confidence in perpetual progress toward perfection held by the *philosophes*. Writing to Turgot, the French statesman and later chief minister of France (1774–76), Hume said:

> I know you are one of those, who entertain the agreeable and laudable, if not too sanguine hope, that human society is capable of perpetual progress towards perfection. . . . Pray, do not the last events in this country appear a little contrary to your system? Here is a people thrown into disorders (not dangerous ones, I hope) merely from the abuse of liberty, chiefly the liberty of the press; without any grievance, I do not only say, real, but even imaginary; and without any of them being able to tell one circumstance of government which they wish to have corrected: They roar liberty, though they have apparently more liberty than any people in the world; a great deal more than they deserve; and perhaps more than any men ought to have. (L 2:180–81)

Hume was continually revising his work. His growing emphasis on authority over liberty is evident in his amendments to his *Essays*, for example, "Of the Original Contract," in which he added the following statement: "As human society is in perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it, it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution, and nearly follow the path which their fathers, treading in the footsteps of theirs, had marked out to them" (E-OC 476–77). Hume made frequent changes to the *History* too, correcting "those foolish English prejudices" in the early Stuart volumes and implementing "above a hundred alterations" after further research, all "invariably to the Tory Side" (E-MOL xxxviii).[25]

Hume had intended his *History* to be impartial, rising above party narratives of the period: "Whether am I Whig or Tory? Protestant or Papist? Scotch or English? I hope you do not all agree on this head; & that there [are] disputes among you about my principles" (L 1:196).[26] Prior histories of England, such as those produced by Rapin and Carte, respectively, favored Whig and Tory narratives. Hume wanted to improve upon these works by crafting a coherent narrative without evident party bias. Nevertheless, his narrative, which rejected the Whig myth of the ancient constitution, reflected the Court Whig narrative, as expressed in John Hervey's *Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd* (1734), that liberty was a modern development. Hume's narrative, that is, did favor the interpretation of some faction, in this case, the Court Whigs, the party in power.

Hume's compassionate portrayal of the Stuart monarchs, on the other hand, caused early reviewers to charge him with Jacobitism. He famously acknowledged that his "view of *things* are more conformable to Whig principles; my presentations of *persons* to Tory prejudices" (L 1:237). By the time the complete edition of the *History* was published in 1762, commentators regularly described it as a Tory history. This interpretation had lasting effects. Mark G. Spencer writes that "by the early years of the nineteenth century—in Britain and America—Hume was most commonly portrayed as a Tory historian who falsely aimed to defend Charles I."[27] Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) and John Stuart Mill expressed little patience for these blatantly Tory elements of Hume's *History*.

Hume's same conservative bent—that is, his preference for established authority over violent or rapid innovations favoring liberty—boosted his reputation in some quarters, namely, the French traditionalist Right in the

years of the French Revolution. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) depicted the French Revolution as an effort to overturn the social and political order in obeisance to an ideology. Hume, however, had already described the English civil wars and the bloody, unsuccessful attempt to institute a Puritan republic under Cromwell, as the results of utopian intrusions into politics. The English civil wars, according to Hume, were produced by fanatical dreams of transforming the social and political order in accord with a religious ideology.

In the early eighteenth century, Montesquieu and Voltaire had cited the English constitution as a positive model, one to be emulated for its system of liberty. In the years 1789–1800, though, a different angle on English constitutional history emerged. Thinkers on the French Right began to present an earlier era of English history, the civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century, as a negative model, one to be avoided for its lessons regarding the dangers of radical reform. Many figures on the French Right selected Hume as their favorite chronicler of the destructive English civil wars.

Laurence L. Bongie, the authoritative source on Hume's reception in France among the French Right, argued that the French Right routinely cited Hume's portrayal of the English revolution, in part because Hume possessed a pristine reputation among the *philosophes*.

Revolutionaries, naturally drawn to the call of the *philosophes* to apply reason to political life and to radically reshape the social and political terrain in accord with it, were more likely to listen to the arguments of Hume, the illustrious man of letters famed in France, than to attend, in Bongie's words, to Burke's "shouting, cranky pamphlet on the Revolution."[28]

*Philosophes* lauded Hume's philosophical essays, especially those most critical of theism, such as "Of Miracles" and the "Natural History of Religion." They also favored the volumes of Hume's *History* in which he criticized religious thought and practice in the Middle Ages. French traditionalists, on the other hand, praised Hume's moderate views on France, monarchy, and Catholicism, as they appeared in the Stuart and Tudor volumes. Above all, these traditionalists echoed Hume's argument that the English civil wars and the destructive experiment in republicanism were the result of the enthusiasm of radical Protestant sects.[29]

According to Bongie, "extreme royalists did in fact make the charge that the French revolutionists were imitating, point for point, procedures of the seventeenth-century English revolution."[30] Louis de Bonald (1754–1840) consulted Hume's *History* for its insights into the psychology

and consequences of revolution: "It is in the history of the last Stuarts, especially in that of the most unfortunate Stuart of all [that is, Charles I], that we must study our own history, that of our own times."[31] Madame Campan (1752–1822), meanwhile, reported Marie-Antoinette's comment that "for a long time now, [King Louis XVI] had been saying to her that everything that was happening in France was an imitation of the revolution in England under Charles I, and that he had been constantly reading the history of that unfortunate monarch in order to avoid making the same mistakes in a similar crisis."[32]

Hume taught French conservatives that revolutionary experiments would end badly, that regicide would lead to regret, that the toppling of the monarchy would lead not to freedom but to despotism, that is, the rise of a usurping tyrant, such as Cromwell. In France, as in England, the most favorable result of revolutionary destruction would be the restoration of monarchy, as had happened in England. And the history of the French Revolution played out according to a similar narrative, as the execution of Louis XVI was followed by the Reign of Terror (1793–94), the return to one-man rule, in the form of Napoleon's dictatorship (1799–1804) and eventual reign as emperor (1804–14, 1815), and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy (from 1814–15).

Although Hume's philosophic history had been praised before the revolution, it was condemned by partisans of liberty who believed he was too impartial, too tepid in his support of the cause of liberty. Revolutionaries turned instead to the historical volume of Catherine Macauley (1731–91), whose history of England was more suitably republican, especially when compared to Hume's allegedly monarchical tome. There is no doubt, however, that Hume's historical volumes harped on the dangers of innovations and the implementation of rational, a priori principles to political affairs. In this way, Bongie argued, Hume exercised a "tremendous hold over French conservative opinion."[33] And if our contemporary political categories of Left and Right were birthed during the French Revolution, in the support for either radical change or the establishment, then the case can be made that Hume, as interpreted in France in the late eighteenth century, belonged on the Right, with Burke rather than Paine.[34] There is no denying that Hume's critique of rationalism in politics is a theme that has been incorporated into modern Anglophone conservative thought from Burke to Oakeshott.[35]

## HUME'S CONSERVATISM, PART 3: DEFENSE OF COMMON LIFE

Donald W. Livingston claims that Hume's *History of England* should be considered "the primal source of modern conservatism" *if* "the intellectual core of conservatism is a critique of ideology in politics."[36] This statement accords with Livingston's overall interpretation of Hume's philosophy as one that demands deference to the habits and customs of common life not only in metaphysics and epistemology, but also in politics. Because of Hume's empirical and historical analysis of political life in the *Essays* and the *History*, Livingston looks to these volumes as the primary sources of Hume's political thought. In them, he finds the privileging of common life. Hume claimed to privilege common life by downplaying the role of abstract reason in human affairs, observing the way things are done in daily life, and judging by appearances rather than trying to discover the essences of things. And as the first philosopher to privilege habit and custom in this way, Hume, according to Livingston, merits the title "the first conservative philosopher."[37]

The Pyrrhonian interpretation of Hume's political thought relies on the depiction of him as a negative thinker, one who articulated a nonfoundationalist conception of politics. Hume, from this perspective, detached politics from philosophy, so that the political order need not rest on philosophy for justification. He indicated that the political projector, who wants to make politics fully rational, is prone to make radical alterations to government. The prudent statesman who knows his political history, on the other hand, recognizes that historical forms of social cooperation reflect existing customs and practices, not the application of abstract reason. We habitually abide by customs and practices. And it is best to preserve them. Those who discard them do so at their own peril. The Pyrrhonian skeptic, then, lives by appearances. He suspends judgment on philosophical and political truth-claims and accepts the network of customs, habits, and laws that press upon him.

Hume's approach to politics, though, is not entirely negative. It is not devoid of philosophical foundations, as a Pyrrhonist's would be. His political vision is positive, possessing philosophical substance. And it is in accordance with his positive philosophy that he criticized patterns of thought present in common life. This is already evident in books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*, in which Hume, after the skeptical dilemma of book 1,

continued his investigations into morals and politics. The moral and political thought he outlined in book 3 of the *Treatise* guided his future investigations in his *Essays* and *History*, forming the standard by which he judged political affairs. In the *Journal britannique* (1752), after the publication of the *Political Discourses*, a reviewer declared, "This formidable sceptic," who previously had imitated Bayle in his appreciation of skeptical paradoxes, "seems at last to have changed his tone. He appears to be moved by the interest of his fellow-citizens: he wants to show them the route to happiness."[38]

Hume's philosophy undercut Whig, Tory, and Christian conceptions of politics. And by means of his skeptical empiricism, he created a new enlightened philosophical outlook, which he thought capable of promoting liberty, toleration, peace, and prosperity. Hume rudely dismissed what he regarded as false philosophy, no matter how enduring or venerable. He expressed his desire, for example, to see books of Scholastic metaphysics and divinity cast into the flames. He described his system of thought as a true philosophy to replace the false. And he wanted to spread that true philosophy, even if it contradicted native or customary belief. He sought to persuade, to reform public opinion in accord with the sound philosophic thinking he articulated in his published works.

Hume's *Essays* and *History* detail the process of civilizational improvement. They inform philosophers and politicians alike of the relationship between cause and effect in human affairs in order to guide future reforms. In the *Political Discourses*, Hume provided an idealized vision of the advancement of human society in which he set out the conditions necessary for social progress.[39] Hume's contributions to the science of political economy in these essays inspired reformers in Naples and Venice, for example, to apply Humean innovations to transform southern Italy, an area still dominated by barons.[40] According to Carl Wennerlind, Hume's *Political Discourses* were written to promote such innovations in England and on the Continent: "Hume . . . set out to reeducate statesmen and the public in sound economic principles. . . . The *Political Discourses* were designed to convince the legislator to refrain from interfering with trade, money, prices, wages, and interest rates. Such interventions suffocate productive pursuits and bring the improvement process to a halt."[41]

Hume, the innovator who sought to reeducate the public and their political leaders on the means of social progress, does not seem to fit the

mold of *conservative defender of common life*. For this reason, Christopher Berry suggests that the attribution of conservatism to Hume is "at least insecure and at most a distortion."[42] Hume's efforts to reconfigure customary opinion, particularly on matters of religion, along with his surprisingly progressive view of history, are not suggestive of a passive, Pyrrhonian, common-life conservative, but of a liberal reformer.[43]

## HUME'S LIBERALISM: A PROGRESSIVE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In his historical writings, Hume highlighted the beneficial effect of trade and economic dynamism on national life. And he was not alone in doing so. Eighteenth-century Scottish thinkers, who had observed a significant boost in trade and in material well-being in the years following the Act of Union in 1707, noticed how trade had contributed to improvements in manufacturing, agriculture, arts, and sciences in Scotland.[44] The Union of 1707 brought Scotland into the English market, enabling free trade and navigation together with the standardization of coins, weights, and measures.[45] In return for gaining access to the English market, however, Scotland sacrificed its political independence. This created a difficulty for civic republican thinkers, such as Adam Ferguson, who tried to maintain a relationship between virtue and active participation in an independent, self-governing political community.[46]

Scottish philosophers in the eighteenth century observed how life in the Scottish Highlands, which remained largely uncultivated, provided a striking backdrop for the advancement of the Lowlands. In fact, the Highland clans were responsible for the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745–46—an uprising favoring the Stuart line of monarchs over the Hanoverian line and seeking to put an end to the prevailing system of mixed monarchy, Protestant rule, and economic development. From the perspective of the Lowlands, where commercial activity was booming, the Highlands looked ripe for social experimentation in the form of the gradual introduction of a modern commercial mindset.[47]

Hume and Smith were at the forefront of the effort to discover why Scotland had undergone such vast improvements in language, morals, and manners during the eighteenth century. The Select Society of Edinburgh, a group cofounded by Hume in 1754, pondered the means to cultivate the

arts and sciences in Scotland. They compared the backward practices of the Highlands with the modernized practices of the Lowlands. They deliberated on the kinds of innovations that could promote advancement not only in the Highlands but also any other place characterized by feudal or tribal governance.

Enlightened histories produced during this period often centered on the theme of progress. William Robertson, a Scottish historian and Presbyterian minister, who wrote influential histories on Scotland and America, authored a well-received work entitled *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769). Robertson asserted that the historian, having observed the advanced state of European civilization, ought to locate the reasons for this advancement. "It is necessary," Robertson wrote, "to mark the great steps by which they advanced from barbarism to refinement, and to point out those general principles and events which, by their uniform as well as extensive operation, conducted all of them to that degree of improvement in policy and in manners," which Robertson believed Europe had attained by the sixteenth century.[48]

Edward Gibbon's monumental, six-volume work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89), focused on this same transition from barbarism to refinement, from the time that Rome was overtaken by Goths, Vandals, and Huns to the present age of civilization. In a letter to Robertson, Gibbon described his elation at finding himself "ranked in the triumvirate of British Historians of the present age," a triumvirate consisting of Gibbon, Robertson, and Hume.[49] Gibbon used Hume as a source while writing his history of the progress of society, but neither Hume nor Gibbon seemed to make use of the *stadial* theory of society that would become a hallmark of Scottish Enlightenment thought, particularly in the works of Smith and John Millar (1735–1801).[50]

Millar constructed a natural history of progress from "ignorance to knowledge and from rude to civilized manners."[51] Millar's natural history of society was, like Smith's, a stadial history in which human beings were said to have steadily advanced from hunting to herding to farming and, finally, to commerce.[52] In commercial society, human beings, who no longer worry about procuring bare necessities, can enjoy broadened prospects. These works of Smith and Millar capture the historical and empirical methodology of the Scottish Enlightenment, in which thinkers sought to understand the chains of causation linking the stages of human development up to the current age, the commercial age of civility and refinement.

The essential components of this stadial history of society, though, are present in Hume's writings, in nascent form at least, in his *Political Discourses* of 1752.[53] These essays contain a sketch of civilizational development, from lower stages to higher stages. Just as book 3 of the *Treatise* provided a theoretical, ahistorical account of the origin of justice and society, the *Political Discourse*s introduced a more grounded, or empirical, version of the historical stages leading to advanced civilization. The three stages of society in the *Political Discourses*, as John Stewart helpfully remarked, are, in a way, "superimposed" upon the timeless narrative of society's advancement in the *Treatise*.[54] The *Political Discourses* add historical meat to the ahistorical skeletal structure introduced in the *Treatise*.

In the *Political Discourses*, Hume depicted the first stage of society as one consisting of hunters and gatherers, that is, savages, who possess a few tools and who wander without possessing land. In the second stage of society, the agricultural stage, private property is introduced and with it inequality, as barbarians live as farmers or herders on large tracts of land. Hume mentioned in "Of Interest" that with the possession of land, "there must immediately arise an inequality of property; and while some possess large tracts of land, others are confined within narrow limits, and some are entirely without any landed property" (E-In 297–98). Hume portrayed agricultural nations as "rude unpolished nations," in which labor is devoted to "the cultivation of the ground" rather than the manufacturing of goods. "The whole society," in this case, "is divided into two classes, proprietors of land, and their vassals or tenants" (E-RA 277). As a result, "Those who possess more land than they can labour, employ those who possess none, and agree to receive a determinate part of the product" (E-In 297–98). Vassals under this arrangement do not enjoy the fruit of their labor.

Eventually, though, a surplus of goods is produced. Individuals transition from agriculture to the manufacturing of goods, which are traded for food. A mixed economy emerges, one that is both agricultural and commercial. The domestic production of luxury goods sparks more demand. New markets begin to form for foreign and domestic luxuries. Merchants arise to facilitate trade in cities. Production becomes more specialized. As societies grow and economic relationships become more complex, the existence of a predictable and stable rule of law, enforced by government, becomes essential to the possession of property, to trade, and to the enforcement of contracts. As an increasing number of economic transactions takes place, particularly among strangers, the integrity of contracts becomes

essential to the movement of goods, to the protection of property, and the accumulation of wealth.

This third stage of society—the commercial stage—represents, for Hume, advanced civilization. In this stage of society's development, the principles of justice are fully actualized. All three of Hume's laws of nature, as expressed in the theoretical history of the *Treatise*, are present in their fullness. As a result, society itself is fully realized.[55] After all, society, for Hume, is oriented toward economic ends. It makes sense, as a result, that the stages of civilization reflect the stages of economic development, from hunting to herding to farming and finally manufacturing and trading. The latter stage makes possible a surge in production, a drastic improvement of standards of living, and significant advancement in liberty and the arts and sciences.

This narrative of advancement, articulated by Hume in the theoretical history of the *Treatise*, is fleshed out not only in the stadial history of the *Political Discourses*, but also in the *History of England*, in which, as John Stewart aptly noted, the era of the Tudors inaugurated the "third phase of civilization" in England.[56] There is an economic teleology, then, evident in both the abstract *Treatise* and the more concrete *Essays* and *History*. In all these texts, Hume operated on the theory that a commercial society is one that is most fully realized, morally, politically, and economically.

Not every history written during the Scottish Enlightenment expressed optimism about the increases in wealth and luxury made possible in commercial society. Adam Ferguson, for example, sought to temper enthusiasm for the modern commercial age by warning of its potential pitfalls in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Ferguson thought the ancient Roman Empire had declined because of the decadence of the Roman people, that is, their fondness for luxury, which fueled an ambition for wealth and for power that reduced their commitment to the common good.[57] Far from serving as society's realization, luxury, according to Ferguson, served as its downfall. Ferguson, in fact, complained that the Epicureans had corrupted the Romans by causing them to associate virtue with pleasure and utility rather than courage and honor.[58]

Hutcheson, like Ferguson, warned against the dangers of luxury. He advocated sumptuary laws and encouraged government to play a more active role in guiding citizens toward virtue.[59] For Hutcheson and Ferguson, unrestrained commercial activity carried with it an innate propensity to

dissipate private and public virtue by incentivizing private consumption over sacrificial acts for the common good. Each of these thinkers, in line with the language of civic humanism, feared that the licentiousness and profligacy that beset ancient Rome in its most prosperous epoch would reappear in the modern commercial age unless the relentless quest for wealth accumulation was somehow moderated. Indeed, according to the tradition of classical humanism, a corrupt citizenry preoccupied with wealth would likely withdraw from political and military affairs in a manner detrimental to the public good.[60]

All of Hume's narratives of social development—in the *Treatise*, the *Essays*, and the "Natural History of Religion"—rebuffed this civic humanist portrayal of the political life cycle of virtue, corruption, and restoration. Hume's *History of England*, too, served as a vindication of his theory that social improvement—both material and moral—is due not to religion or to civic virtue, but to economic advancement. For this reason, the *History of England* must be interpreted alongside Hume's other writings on social improvement.[61] Although it deals with more concrete subject matter, the *History of England* is no less philosophical than the *Treatise*.[62]

Regarding the philosophical nature of Hume's *History*, Roger Emerson explains that Hume's historical writings are based, first, on historical records, and second, on the science of man that Hume articulated in the *Treatise*. Hume intended for his science of man, which was drawn from experiments in common life, to illuminate the permanent nature of the human person. As a result, his narrative histories, though derived from historical data, remain lodged in a philosophical foundation, the science of man, which acts as structural support. His conjectural and theoretical histories, on the other hand, insofar as they concern events, such as prehistorical ones, that lack material data, rely more explicitly on anthropological assumptions dependent on Hume's science of man.[63]

Owen Ruffhead (1723–69), in his review of Hume's *History* in the *Monthly Review*, recognized the central role that progress played in Hume's narrative.[64] According to Ruffhead, Hume provided "a very clear and accurate account of the religion, laws, manners, and customs . . . trade and commerce, the value of money, and price of commodities" during each monarch's reign. This "enable[d] the attentive reader to trace the gradual advances, by which we rose from a condition of hospitable barbarism, to our present imperfect state of modern refinement."[65] Although Hume,

who was called the English Tacitus, wrote a history that, like Tacitus's *Annals*, was arranged according to the reigns of successive monarchs, Hume's work was not narrowly focused on politics. In Andrew Sabl's words, "Hume's *History* . . . combines an older, 'Tacitean' history (narration plus insights into character, and wry observation) with an eighteenth-century philosophical history of social, economic, political, and intellectual trends."[66]

The reigns of the monarchs in Hume's *History* constitute larger eras defined by certain general characteristics. These characteristics, viewed together, form distinct stages in the progress of civilization. The early, Anglo-Saxon era, for example, was defined by license, resulting from a lack of central authority. William the Conqueror (1028–87) inaugurated another era, the feudal era, notable for frequent jurisdictional disputes between kings and barons. The Tudors ushered in the modern era by establishing strong central authority that made security and liberty possible. The Stuarts reigned in an era of violent contests between monarchical and parliamentary powers, each vying for supremacy. This era ended with the Glorious Revolution and the established government that Hume defended. It was here, the year 1688, that Hume ended his *History*.[67]

Hume sharply distinguished the premodern age from the modern age. For Hume, the distant past was not to be revered. He depicted the premodern age as one of antiquarian interest only, of no value for the science of politics: "Whoever carries his anxious researches into preceding periods is moved by a curiosity, liberal indeed and commendable; not by any necessity for acquiring knowledge of public affairs, or the arts of civil government" (HIST 3:82). Inquiry into medieval society merely illustrated the "many barbarous ages" through which England progressed until it "at last reached the dawn of civility and science." It remained worthwhile to study the modern age, though, the age of science and civility, because it "has so close a connexion with virtue and humanity," and "as it is a sovereign antidote against superstition, is also the most effectual remedy against vice and disorders of every kind" (HIST 2:518–9).

The modern civilized age, according to Hume, began during the reign of the Tudors. At this time, three crucial developments paved the way for civilizational advancement: (1) royal authority prevailed over baronial authority, making possible the universal enforcement of the rule of law; (2) England separated from the Catholic Church, causing religion to be subordinated to the civil authority and superstition to be curtailed; and

(3) trade increased, producing gains in liberty and knowledge. The Tudor dynasty began after the Wars of the Roses (1455–87), a series of wars over the source of the king's legitimacy. It was after these wars, that the Tudors—Henry VII (1457–1509; r. 1485–1509), Henry VIII (1491–1547; r. 1509–47), and Elizabeth I (1533–1603; r. 1558–1603)—bolstered the power of the Crown over the nobility, wrested control of the spiritual realm from the Roman Church, and began an effort to displace the Dutch as the premier maritime merchant power. In this way, Hume portrayed England's political history as a gradual perfection of law and government in which authority was centralized, superstition throttled, and civil liberties expanded.

The language of "perfection," moreover, is not alien to Hume's *History*. It is precisely the language that he used when describing the progress of liberty. When lamenting how the Normans were "so licentious a people," he commented that "true or regular liberty . . . requires such improvement in knowledge and morals, as can only be the result of reflection and experience, and must grow to perfection during several ages of settled and established government" (HIST 1:254). During the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, this progress toward perfection occurred. Hume wrote that in these years, England "gradually attained that situation, with regard to commerce, arts, science, government, police, and cultivation, in which they have ever since persevered" (HIST 3:81).

There is no doubt that Hume's narrative of progress, as depicted in the *History*, is gradual and evolutionary, consisting of fluctuations and many stops and starts (HIST 2:311). Nevertheless, Hume saw in Tudor rule a clear marker of progress, "the commencement of modern history" (L 1:251). And this age of science and civility could not begin without the relaxation of feudal tenures and the centralization of law.

Feudal arrangements had been introduced after the Norman Conquest. But these were unable to alter the aversion "to commerce and the arts," the dearth of industry, the misadministration of justice, and the "great oppression and violence" that had prevailed among the Anglo-Saxons (HIST 1:166–67). In feudal society, too, the dearth of industry kept "the inhabitants poor and contemptible; and the political institutions were calculated to render that poverty perpetual" (HIST 1:463–66). Unless a person lived as a military noble, he would find himself deprived of personal liberty, living at the will of his master, because in feudal society, "every one, that was not noble was a slave" (HIST 2:522).[68] Any member

of the gentry, who might attain wealth by trade or manufacturing, would find himself susceptible to injury by the tyrannical barons. Nevertheless, in a turbulent and violent age, men had little alternative than to submit themselves to lords. As a result, they, "not protected by law in their lives and properties, sought shelter, by their personal servility and attachments, under some powerful chieftain, or by voluntary combinations" (HIST 2:521–22). Servility of this sort constituted the essence of that "ancient barbarous and feudal constitution" (E-CP 497).

This barbarous and feudal constitution is the form of government associated with the second stage of Hume's stadial history. The feudal government of this agricultural age failed to produce a stable regime of law and liberty because of the rivalries between baronial, clerical, and royal power. The challenges posed to the monarch by the great barons and the Catholic clergy produced a multiplicity of jurisdictions that practically guaranteed an irregular administration of justice and insecure possession of property.[69] Furthermore, knights and vassals proved faithful primarily to their lord in both peace and war and as a result exhibited tribal loyalty and a martial spirit. This barbarous age was characterized by violence and uncertainty precisely on account of the priority of tribal ties and familial loyalties, an us-versus-them, friend-versus-enemy mentality that preceded the cooperative pursuit of opulence characteristic of the commercial age. Hume wrote that in feudal society, "men openly associated themselves, under the patronage of some great baron, for their mutual defence. They wore public badges, by which their confederacy was distinguished. They supported each other in all quarrels, iniquities, extortions, murders, robberies, and other crimes. Their chief was more their sovereign than the king himself; their own band was more connected with them than their country. Hence the perpetual turbulence, disorders, factions, and civil wars of those times" (HIST 2:331). Monarchy during barbarous ages was "not regulated by any fixed maxims" (HIST 2:284; E-RP 125; E-Ta 347). Under the "barbarous monarchy" of Edward III (1312–77; r. 1321–77), for example, "the king conducted himself by one set of principles; the barons by another; the commons by a third; the clergy by a fourth. All these systems of government were opposite and incompatible" (HIST 2:284).

One interesting element of Hume's narrative of the dawn of civilization in England is that the actions taken by the absolute Tudor monarchs proved as essential, if not more essential, to progress as the spirit of the

age, that is, the spirit of commerce. In other words, in Hume's narrative, the centralization of authority preceded the spirit of commerce chronologically and served as a necessary condition for its appearance. The monarchs acted to reduce the power of the nobles, enabling the growth of the middling ranks of men engaging in manufacturing and trade. Government action, in other words, promoted the spirit of commerce.

Henry VII's "most important law," in Hume's analysis, "was that by which the nobility and gentry acquired a power of breaking the ancient entails, and of alienating their estates. By means of this law, joined to the beginning luxury and refinements of the age, the great fortunes of the barons were gradually dissipated, and the property of the commons encreased in England. It is probable, that Henry foresaw and intended this consequence" (HIST 3:77). Thus, the movement toward perfection was due not only to the spirit of the age, but also to legislative reform, which, in this case, was instituted successfully to instigate a power shift from the nobles to men of middling ranks. Hume acknowledged in "Of Refinement of the Arts" that the "lower house," the "support of our popular government," benefited from a shift in the "balance of property," favoring the Commons (E-RA 278). This shift in the balance of property—and of power—would not have happened without legislative action.

Owen Ruffhead, in his review of the Tudor volumes, emphasized that Henry VII's actions led directly to the destruction of the feudal system. Hume acknowledged this, by writing that there hardly "passed any session during this reign, without some statute against engaging retainers, and giving them badges or liveries; a practice by which they were, in a manner, enlisted under some great lord, and were kept in readiness to assist him in all wars, insurrections, riots, violences, and even in bearing evidence for him in courts of justice" (HIST 3:75). "Abolishing that pernicious practice of retaining," Ruffhead observed, changed "the course of property," and this process, by which former retainers were forced to leave the lord's land and learn a trade to make a living, provided the social circumstances in which the improvement of the arts could take place.[70]

Hume contended in the *History* that the increase of the arts put an end to feudal tenures more "than all the severities of law" (HIST 3:76). He argued that the barons, desiring to emulate one another and outdo one another in "the splendour and elegance of their equipage, houses, and tables," spent money on luxuries rather than retainers. This, according to Hume,

resulted in former retainers becoming freemen, who were no longer subject to "a vicious idleness by their superiors," but were at liberty to pursue a calling of their choice. Ruffhead's point, however, is that "the laws, by suppressing the mischief of retaining, furnished hands for the improvement of the arts." The feudal order, that is, had to be "effectually abolished, before the arts could flourish to a degree sufficient to extend their influence over prevailing habits and manners."[71] And the feudal order was abolished by centralized political authority.

There seems to be an inconsistency between the *Treatise* and the *History of England* on this point. In the *Treatise*, human beings act, rather naturally, as merchants. By means of unverbalized cooperation, they coordinate with one another to carry out their natural inclination, which is, as Smith termed it, to "truck, barter, and trade." Political authority arises later to enforce the legal mechanisms, largely customary, deemed necessary for sustaining economic transactions.

But in the *History of England*, human beings are not born merchants. Rather, they become merchants as a result of the absolute monarch's statutes, aimed at dismantling the feudal order and impeding the authority of the barons. This legislative action, at least as much as baronial vanity, turned retainers into merchants, which propelled improvement in the arts. The commercial spirit, then, to which Hume referred as the spirit of the age, was not natural, but created, in part, by legislative reform.[72] The commercial order, that is, arose not spontaneously but because of the maneuvering of political actors who intended to change the social order by undercutting baronial power and encouraging industry.

Hume quite plainly endorsed legislative reforms and innovations designed to promote an industrious and commercial way of life. In fact, when dismissing Henry VII's decision to outlaw usury, in obeisance to "the superstition of the age," Hume assailed those, and other laws, that were "harmful to trade," regarding them as "unreasonable and iniquitous" (HIST 3:77). In other words, Hume described laws injurious to trade as sinful. This captures the way in which he redefined "transgression," so that it no longer signified violation of God's law, but violation of the economic law, according to which commerce produces material and moral advancement. John Brown responded to Hume's reconceptualization of transgression with the following wisecrack: "With St. Paul, *Godliness* was Gain; But with *this* Man, *Gain* produceth *Godliness*."[73]

Hume had few qualms about applying insights from his political science to human affairs to advance civility and economic gain. In the Stuart volumes, Hume mentioned that "all human institutions . . . require continual amendments, which are, in reality, so many alterations. It is not indeed possible to make a law, which does not innovate, more or less, in the government" (HIST 6:294). Hume applauded the drastic innovations that James I, for example, introduced to Ireland to civilize the inhabitants. James I abolished Irish customs and introduced English law in order to put an end to the following injustices: arbitrary taxation practiced by chieftains, severe and unequal legal punishments, and divisions of property that impeded industry. Hume advocated a similar approach to civilizing the Scottish Highlands.[74] To civilize and humanize a population, it is necessary to implement the rule of law and promote industry, as a habit and a way of life, among the people. In his praise of James I's policy in Ireland, Hume declared:

> No man . . . enjoyed the fixed property of any land; to build, to plant, to inclose, to cultivate, to improve, would have been so much lost labour. . . . After abolishing these Irish customs, and substituting English law in their place, James, having taken all the natives under his protection, and declared them free citizens, proceeded to govern by a regular administration, military as well as civil. . . . And, by these means, Ulster, from being the most wild and disorderly province of all Ireland, soon became the best cultivated and most civilized. Such were the arts, by which James introduced humanity and justice among the people, who had ever been buried in the most profound barbarism. Noble cares! Much superior to the vain and criminal glory of conquests; but requiring ages of perseverance and attention to perfect what had been so happily begun. (HIST 5:48–49)

Centralized authority, particularly in the form of absolute monarchy, was the first step toward civilizing England during the reign of the Tudors. The Tudors "pull[ed] down those disorderly and licentious tyrants" and established a "regular execution of the laws" (HIST 2:525). The move toward centralization required not only diminishing the power of the barons, but also reducing the sway of the Roman clergy, which, according to Hume, obstructed advancements in liberty and learning. Henry VIII's

separation from Rome, then, with the creation of the Church of England, was another necessary step in Hume's account of the progress of civilization in England.

Until the dawn of the civilized age, the Catholic Church remained the supreme religious institution to which the Christians in England predominantly belonged. The power of the Roman Church had "continually increased in England," Hume wrote, and "it soon reached the same height, at which it had, during some time, stood in France and Italy" (HIST 1:207). This broadened reach of the Roman Church occurred in part because "the stupid people possessed no science or reason, which they could oppose to the most exorbitant pretensions" of the clergy, which claimed that "the ancient laws and customs of states had no authority against divine right" (HIST 1:264). The Roman religion sunk "England itself" into "the deepest abyss of ignorance and superstition." And England could not extricate itself from this ignorance and superstition without "shaking off the papal yoke" (HIST 2:70).[75]

Henry VIII abolished the "ancient religion" and established the framework for "the regular execution of justice." This regular execution of justice did not exempt the clergy from the crimes of treason or murder, nor did it allow the laity to seek immunity through the protection of the Roman Church (HIST 3:324). In this way, then, the absolute monarch defeated its competitors, placing all people equally under the sway of royal law. In Hume's account, Henry VIII stifled the Roman clergy's ability to spread superstitious beliefs antithetical to liberty and learning. By creating a new state church, Henry VIII sought to retain religion "within tolerable limits, and prevent its abuses" (HIST 3:207). The king's supremacy in all matters of religion, Hume remarked, "prepared for checking the exorbitancies of superstition, and breaking those shackles, by which all human reason, policy, and industry had so long been encumbered" (HIST 3:207).

Ultimately, Hume advocated the establishment of religion: "There must be an ecclesiastical order, and a public establishment of religion in every civilized community" (HIST 3:134–5). Hume endorsed state religion, though, not from a religious viewpoint, but because he considered the monarch to be best equipped to restrain the ambition of the clergy. He concluded that "ecclesiastical establishments . . . prove in the end advantageous to the political interests of society" (HIST 3:135).

Furthermore, Hume advocated toleration, not on its own merits, but because of its tendency to preserve peace and order. He criticized Mary

Tudor, for example, for imprudently attempting to generate religious uniformity by means of the sword. Because civil governance concerns the management of passions, the goal of the monarch ought to consist in eliminating the "zeal for speculative opinions" (HIST 3:436). Persecution, as a general policy, should be avoided, because it produces martyrdom. And "the glory of martyrdom," Hume argued, "stimulates all the more furious zealots, especially the leaders and preachers." "Open the door to toleration," however, and Hume asserted that, as a result, "mutual hatred relaxes among the sectaries; their attachment to their particular modes of religion decays; the common occupations and pleasures of life succeed to the acrimony of disputation" (HIST 3:433).[76] Indeed, focus on the common occupations and pleasures of life is the characteristic feature of the spirit of commerce and luxury that arose during the age of the Tudors.

Although Hume thought the popular Christianity practiced in Great Britain and on the Continent was false, he acknowledged some of that religion's contributions to the public good. For example, Hume reserved some praise for the Puritans, though not much, for igniting the fire for liberty that, even though it caused enormous strife during the civil wars, ultimately led to the present establishment. He admitted that Puritans were primarily responsible for kindling the "spark of liberty" and "it was to this sect, whose principles appear so frivolous and habits so ridiculous, that the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution" (HIST 4:146). It is evident, however, that these positive aspects of Christianity were, for Hume, beneficial because of their political consequences. Christianity, as a religion, did little to change the inhumane mores of the barbarians. In other words, Hume did not regard the Christian religion as a civilizing force. Even though Christianity performed admirably in connecting the various states of Europe during the Middle Ages, Hume asserted, it was never essential to the practices of justice and humanity. In relation to the Saxons, at least, the Christian religion was not "very effectual, in banishing their ignorance, or softening their barbarous manners" (HIST 1:51).

With political authority centralized under the Tudors, neither the barons nor the clergy were equipped to restrain the emergence of the spirit of industry. But Hume did not think that every Tudor monarch effectively promoted commerce. Henry VIII, for example, in spite of "abolishing monasteries, and retrenching holidays," pursued other policies, such as fixing wages and banning luxurious apparel, that contributed to "a decay of commerce, and industry, and populousness in England" (HIST 3:330). Similarly,

Henry VII, his father, failed to spur the economy. Despite his love of wealth, Henry VII lent money without interest to merchants whose enterprises were certain to be unsuccessful (HIST 3:77). He also placed "absurd limitations" on manufacturing, while keeping up farmhouses and opposing enclosures, all in the effort to promote husbandry (HIST 3:79).

It was not until the reign of Edward VI (1537–53; r. 1547–53), Henry VIII's son and successor, that the spirit of industry began to appear in England. Hume claimed that this spirit of industry emerged because of some of Edward VI's policies.[77] And Queen Elizabeth I, like Edward VI, "was desirous, to encourage commerce and navigation" (HIST 4:374–75). The pace of the transition from barbarous to civilized monarchy quickened under the reign of Elizabeth I. Hume distinguished the civilized Elizabethan monarchy, "exercised after the European manner," from barbarous Eastern monarchies, which, by not securing civil liberty and promoting commercial activity, made their subjects "totally naked, defenceless, and disarmed (HIST 4:383–84). The universal reach of the rule of law combined with the encouragement of commerce and the elimination of an independent religious jurisdiction, all of which were enhanced by Tudor rule, constituted, for Hume, the inauguration of civilized monarchy.[78]

Later, under Stuart rule, the middling class of men, the entrepreneurs, merchants, townsmen, and gentry, challenged the power of the king through the institution of the Commons. It was absolute Tudor rule, though, that first introduced civil liberty into England. By making this argument, Hume punctured the myth of the ancient constitution, as he intended to do. According to Hume, England did not need to go backward to recover a lost, ancient liberty, but to move forward to continue to reap the benefits of modern liberty, which was gained precisely by overcoming a feudal, agricultural, and ignorant past.

The post-1688 constitutional settlement resolved the tension between royal prerogative and parliamentary privilege. But this constitutional settlement remained in perpetual flux. The constitution, in fact, remained the source of partisan rivalry. The parties would not disappear. Hume knew that. He figured, though, that the existing government could be maintained peacefully with the help of a proper understanding of history and of the constitution. He provided such an account in his *Essays* and his *History*. And he endeavored to shape the opinions of the middling ranks of men and women, who, increasingly free and increasingly educated, populated the public sphere.

This foray into Hume's *History* is intended to emphasize the following points. First, Hume's *History* has a progressive character. He painted the past in a negative light.[79] And he attributed civilizational advancement to victory over violence, ignorance, and superstition, which he considered native to man's more primitive existence. According to Holthoon, "Freeing ourselves from the past is the hallmark of Hume writing history."[80]

Second, this narrative of progress, contained in the *History*, corresponds to Hume's other conjectural and theoretical histories, which trace the improvement of the mind and of society from one stage to another. The "state of nature," though it does not appear in the same way as it does in Hobbes's and Locke's political tracts, frequently appears as a literary device in Hume's conjectural, theoretical, and historical narratives. Although humanity departed from its original, primitive state in stages, not all at once, Hume still resorted to the notion of the original state of nature to conceptualize the way in which society advanced. Every step away from hunting and gathering toward industry, away from tribalism toward limited monarchy, is a step away from the original state of nature toward civilized living.

Third, Hume used this notion of civilizational progress as a standard by which to judge legal and political innovations. Legal reforms, according to Hume, are not inherently bad. But they must be subject to the test of whether they advance society beyond the miserable and oppressive past.

This presentation of Hume's progressive historical narrative is subject to two objections. The first is that Hume's conception of history, at times, seems cyclical rather than linear. Andre Willis, for example, argues that Hume departed from peers, such as Adam Smith, "who assumed the natural progress of history." Hume's philosophy of history, according to Willis, includes both progression and regression, what Willis describes as a "'two steps forward, two steps back' philosophy of history."[81] This formula of progress/regress is evident in Hume's "Natural History of Religion," in which he claimed that the progress from polytheism to monotheism reverts to a semipolytheistic stage in which saints, for example, are conceived as demigods, inhabiting the space between human beings and God. Similarly, Hume's history of the arts and sciences is cyclical insofar as he theorized that a culture responsible for significant artistic achievements will be unable to maintain its supremacy. In "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," he contended that when "*the arts and sciences come to perfection in any state, from that moment they naturally, or rather necessarily decline, and seldom or never revive in that nation, where they formerly flourished*" (E-RP 134–35).

Hume's language in this passage is notable because it indicates that decline in the arts and sciences is necessary. He certainly did not think, as the French *philosophes* did, that social progress was necessary, or guaranteed.[82] But, as Emerson observes, Hume's narrative of historical development "sometimes seem[s] not to be cyclical but, in the long term, progressive or spiraling upwards."[83] In the *Political Discourses*, for example, Hume proposed a linear view of civility that accorded with the stadial theory of history. It does not include a rise and a fall, only a rise.[84]

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Hume, as he aged, became increasingly pessimistic about the prospects for social improvement deriving from the spirit of liberty. He also promoted zeal for the maintenance of the post-1688 political order. These are two reasons why some Hume scholars propose that he is a conservative. But this kind of conservatism does seem to qualify, as Sir Leslie Stephen suggested, as "cynical." Hume was enthused about the gains of civilization, but he doubted the public's ability to maintain those gains. As a result, he encouraged his readers to reduce their admiration of the past and to fix their minds on the present. Tremulous about the possibility of decline, Hume wielded his pen, proclaiming the glories of the present, modern, civilized age, and its corresponding benefits. He pled with his readers to moderate their cries for liberty, to temper their partisan fervor, to preserve their established government. This kind of conservatism is characterized by clinging to societal gains and fearing their loss.

## A CONSERVATISM MADE SAFE FOR MODERNITY

Hume defended the established constitution and the priority of authority over liberty. But he did so within a philosophical framework that rejected premodern conceptions of the good life and the good society. And he did so within a historical framework that depicted the feudal and papal past as barbarous, backward, and ignorant.

A Humean approach to politics might best be described as a kind of "presentism." Hume did not outline a vision of future progress. His *History of England* ended at 1688, the date of the Glorious Revolution. He portrayed the mixed constitution that arose at that time as the fruition of historical development, partially the result of accident, partially the result of

foresight. The British, according to Hume, were tasked with maintaining that constitution.

Hume defended this conservative goal by progressive means, arguing that eighteenth-century peace and prosperity resulted from the victory of the modern way of life over the benighted modes of a bygone era. This brand of conservative liberalism, intent on preserving a modern way of life, prioritizes stagnation over innovation. It is characterized by fear rather than hope. And though preserving societal gains against the forces of faction and fanaticism is surely a worthy endeavor, it would seem to be susceptible of devolving into the stereotypical standpoint of the curmudgeonly conservative: angry, gloomy, resistant to any and all change.

For Donald Livingston, though, this Humean defense of the establishment is at the heart of modern conservatism.[85] Livingston, of course, would regard Hume's conservatism not as cynical, but as customary. Sagar, who has most recently interpreted Hume in this light, praises Hume's common-life conservatism, which by locating legitimacy in custom and opinion resists all attempts to subject political life to the demands of ideology, to the rational planning derived from radical philosophy.[86] According to this interpretation, the standards by which to judge political life are drawn not from philosophy, but from custom, the historical context in which the political order came to be. This allegedly makes politics an autonomous sphere, in which legitimacy comes not from the application of moral or philosophical insights, but from the activity of politics itself as it is played out in history. *Hume's political theory, however, did not rely on passive acceptance of prevailing custom and opinion. It sought to change custom and opinion in accord with the philosophical foundations we outlined in part 2 of this book.*

And this foundation served as the standard of judgment that Hume applied to political regimes. In accord with his progressive conception of history, he criticized custom and opinion, and sought to alter them, insofar as they impeded the advancement of civilization. He supposed that society should continue its efforts to expunge the barbarous elements remaining within an otherwise civilized Great Britain. This included the feudal order (the agricultural way of life), monastic orders (the religious way of life), party allegiance, and the speculative basis of the parties, all of which, no matter how grounded in custom and opinion, he judged, from the perspective of sound philosophy, to be obstacles to improvement. As a result, his alleged conservatism has no share of the traditionalism evident in

Burke's claim that, though society "is indeed a contract," "it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."[87] Burke supposed that tradition wrapped up and protected the wisdom of the past. He regarded society as a partnership among the living and the dead. Hume never viewed society in this way. He may have conceived of society as a partnership in "every virtue and in all perfection." But Hume's virtue is a specific one—useful, agreeable, commercial. And his perfection is a perfection of civil pluralism. The good society, from this Humean angle, is a progressive one. It consists of those present, here and now, who are intent on preserving the conditions having led to the upward spiral of historical development and distancing themselves from the ignorance, poverty, and inhumanity that plagued their ancestors.

Many of Hume's contemporaries read the *History* in this way, neither as a cyclical history nor as a defense of customary belief and opinion, but as an irreligious attempt to overcome vulgar beliefs and practices by changing the public mindset regarding the nature, origins, and purposes of social and political life. These readers immediately perceived that Hume blasted traditional Christianity, mocking it and expressing a desire for its demise, while relentlessly attacking Whig and Tory party doctrine in an effort to weaken party loyalty. In this case, Hume's *History* seems philosophical, even "revisionist."[88] One might call it, as John B. Stewart did, an "occasional" work designed to change public opinion at a particular point in time.[89] Hume wanted to change beliefs on the ground—on matters of religion, politics, and economics—to continue the trend of advancement in laws, institutions, arts, and sciences. And the first step in promoting these changes was to place the *History* in the hands of readers. In this, Hume was successful.

Hume's *History* was by far his most commercially successful work. Mark Towsey describes Hume's *History* as "one of the most commercially successful publishing enterprises of the Georgian age," which "appeared in a dazzling number of editions and was translated into French and German," and it was also owned, borrowed, and read in America. Towsey

writes that well into the nineteenth century, Hume's *History*, which was held by most circulating libraries, was borrowed by men and women from all walks of life, including local gentry, farmers, lawyers, merchants, schoolmasters, tanners, tailors, shoemakers, clergymen, bankers, and town magistrates. Towsey writes:

> In Scotland, Hume's *History* was standard issue for polite libraries and genteel drawing rooms across the country, eagerly acquired by dukes, MPs, and lairds; transatlantic merchants and enterprising industrialists; lawyers, physicians, and clergymen; as well as more modest consumers such as William Munro, a Highland cattle dealer; Duncan Chisholm, a leather merchant in Inverness; and John Surtees, an iron founder in Markinch. . . . Hume's *History* could be borrowed from most circulating libraries and virtually all subscription libraries in Scotland and was always among the most frequently borrowed books at any book-lending institution for which we have circulation records.[90]

In the *History*, Hume sought to promote right opinion about the essentials of government in a way that might reduce both party strife and religious fanaticism, which he considered the twin dangers to civilized society. To an eighteenth-century Scottish readership that was overwhelmingly Christian, Hume's religious skepticism, which seemed to pervade the *History*, gave the text an air of partiality. Roger Flexman, writing in the *Monthly Review* in 1754, observed "how singular Mr. *Hume* is in his notions of religion." Flexman continued: "He seems to be of opinion, that there are but two species of it in all nature, superstition and fanaticism; and under one or other of these, he gives us to understand, the whole of the Christian profession is, and ever was, included. His treatment, indeed, of every denomination of Christians, to speak the most favourably, is far from being such as becomes a gentleman, and may, we apprehend, prejudice his reputation *even as an historian*, in the opinion of many intelligent and considerate readers."[91]

In a commonplace book entitled "Amusements in Solitude," a female member of the Stuart family of Castlemilk rated Robertson's histories more highly than Hume's, in large part because of the latter's "impiety." Hume, a "fine genius" otherwise, "doubted of—despised, & neglected" the Christian faith, but Robertson composed histories that were spiritually

nourishing, and historically illuminating. She counted among the strengths of Robertson's *History of America* (1777) that it "increases & strengthens my faith in Moses account of creation, & the history he gives of man, before & after the fall—confirms my belief of the necessity of a divine revelation, to restore human nature to purity & happiness; and the excellency of the Christian Religion for accomplishing that Glorious purpose."[92] Since Hume did not regard religion as "the distinguishing characteristic of man," he offered the weak argument for established religion, that the civil authority should subdue religious authority to temper its excesses, rather than the strong argument for established religion, that the civil authority should promote religion as an institution laudable, useful, and necessary.

Hume was as famous for his harshness toward religion as he was for his wit and eloquence. Towsey's exploration of commonplace books, marginalia, journals, and personal correspondence of the period reveals that "more devout readers usually greeted" Hume's denunciations of organized religion "with howls of protest."[93] Reverend William Cameron, for example, who studied under the famed Hume critic James Beattie at Marischal College, Aberdeen, respected Hume's *History*, but was dismayed about "the tendency of [Hume's] skeptical philosophy to destroy the power of both [civil and religious authority]." Cameron filled the pages of his commonplace books, which contained his writings on Hume, with Bible passages and proofs for the existence of God.[94] Andrew Douglas of the Royal Navy wrote in his notes on Beattie's *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, "To endeavor to overturn the plainest principles of human knowledge, to subvert the foundations of morality & religion is philosophically playing the Devil. If the Devil had given Eve such an insipid Hume apple, she would have spit it in his face."[95]

This reputation for infidelity caused some individuals to discourage libraries from shelving Hume's *History* and to discourage family members from perusing its volumes. An anonymous writer advising readers on which works to incorporate into a library stated that Hume's "visible disesteem for religion, and his carelessness in some facts, make [the *History*] not so valuable a work as so capable an author might have rendered."[96] And Hanna Hume, who was not related to David Hume, wrote to her daughter in London that the *History* could not be read apart from Hume's "diabolical" philosophy, which sought "to overturn natural & revealed religion & all morality & to establish atheism."[97] In the letter, Hanna Hume directed her daughter to Beattie's critique of Hume.

It was not unusual for readers to suspect that Hume's metaphysical principles influenced his historical writing, especially on the topic of religion and its role in England. Readers questioned whether an infidel could write good history. Francis Garden (1721–93), a Scottish judge, asserted, "One chief end of [Hume's] metaphysical writings is to extinguish every sentiment of religion."[98] And Hannah More (1745–1833), a poet and playwright who was friends with Samuel Johnson, contended that it was just to suspect the historical narrative of someone, no matter how celebrated, whose metaphysical writings were irreligious. Referring to Hume as a "serpent under a bed of roses," More argued that Hume depicted all religious believers as delusional, "as weak and credulous men," while always assuming the worst in people, ascribing "some low motive" to explain "the best actions of the best men." As a result, in Hume's *History*, there was no evident difference between "the designs of the religious and the corrupt."[99] Hume may have written the *History* to train the moral sentiments of the public, but, More supposed, history that interpreted human affairs in such a cynical manner could only train the moral sentiments poorly.

Much of the religiously devout public that encountered Hume's *History* around the time of its publication promptly spotted the ways in which his antireligious bias intruded upon his work as a historian. Nearly one hundred years later, Sir Francis Palgrave (1788–1861) authored an essay, "Hume and His Influence upon History," that appeared in *Quarterly Review* (1844). This essay laid out several examples of how irreligion corrupted the historian's work. Palgrave argued that "the one end and intent of the *History*, which gives to the whole the epic unity," is Hume's desire "to nullify religion." Hume's attempt to nullify religion, moreover, bore the mark of his science of man. He argued in the *Treatise*, for example, that metaphysical beliefs do not move human beings to act. The passions do. It is for this reason, Palgrave alerted his readers, that Hume, in his *History*, "constantly labours to suppress any *belief in belief*, as an efficient cause of action."[100] Hume's "science of man," that is, directed his interpretation of historical events and his presentation of those events to the British public. Hume's historical work, as much as his theoretical work, sought to dispel the notion that metaphysical beliefs serve as motives to action.

Palgrave bemoaned "the *consummate Rhetor's* continued perversion of *history* into a panegyric of infidelity," giving precise examples of how Hume did so.[101] Of those examples, four will be mentioned here. First, Palgrave accused Hume of misrepresenting medieval divinity. Hume, for

example, stated that for several centuries, "the whole scope of sermons and homilies was directed" to "the exact and faithful payments of tithes to the clergy" (HIST 1:60–61). Palgrave corrected this obviously false portrayal by emphasizing that the Bible constantly was applied, whether "in theory or in practice, for support or example," to "all the affairs of human life." It was the Bible, "an element of all learning, of all literature, of jurisprudence, and of all knowledge" that served "as one wonderful epic, beginning before time—ending in eternity." And if one were to consult the sermons of "Bede, Ælfric, Gregory, Anselm, Bernard, Gerson, or Thomas à Kempis," one would find no mention of the payment of tithes. Hume not only described clergymen as motivated almost solely by "sordid avarice," but also belittled them for allegedly being "little versed in Scripture." Palgrave had little patience for these untruths, delivered by Hume, "the sneering enemy of revelation," who, though "denying the miracles of the Gospel, confessed that he had never read through the New Testament."[102]

Second, Palgrave claimed that Hume calumniated religious characters by, whenever possible, misrepresenting, concealing, or deprecating their intentions. Palgrave contended that "this constant unfairness ruins the mere historical narrative."[103] Third, and relatedly, Hume reduced the clergy to two types: those who don "the wolf-mask" and those who don "the fox-mask." Gregory the Great, for example, appeared in Hume's *History* as an example of the former, a self-aggrandizer driven by "raving, craving ambition." Augustine appeared as a representative of the latter, a deceiver whose every act is stained by hypocrisy. Hume's reductive treatment of priestly character, according to Palgrave, indicated that, throughout the *History*, "a general presumption lies against either the understanding or the morals, of *any one who is dignified with the title of Saint* in those ignorant ages."[104]

Fourth, Palgrave found that Hume dropped all references to the positive role that religion played even in the lives of great leaders. Palgrave discovered that "in Hume's very elaborate life of Alfred, which occupies one-fourth of the *History of England* up to that period, he has *concealed every passage, every fact, every incident, every transaction, displaying that active belief in Christianity, which governed the whole tenor and course of Alfred's life*."[105] Palgrave provided plenty of proof for this charge. In order to maintain a life of poverty, Alfred (849–899; r. 871–899) devoted half of his revenue to religious purposes. Hume made no mention of this. Alfred's works

included translations of the writings of St. Gregory, St. Augustine, and the Bible, in addition to other commentaries and reflections on scripture, contained in a diary he carried with him everywhere he went. These theological works of Alfred were indeed recorded in Hume's source material, but he made no mention of them in his *History.* Palgrave convincingly presented the case:

> Hume, by repainting Alfred's portrait in coarse and gaudy colours, has thus daubed out all the characteristics of Alfred's individuality—his religious foundations, his devotional charity—his labours for the diffusion of the Scriptures—his constant seeking comfort and support from divine truth—his bodily penances and mortifications—and, above all, that, as king and legislator, Alfred entirely based his laws upon the Bible, declaring to his people that immutable truth which *no* other king or legislator has been sufficiently enlightened to proclaim, that if they obeyed the precepts of Almighty God, no other law would be required.[106]

Hume's irreligious agenda provides evidence that he was much less concerned with preserving custom and prevailing opinion than in promoting the progress of sound philosophy against the specter of superstition. As Sextus Empiricus plainly stated, a skeptic aims to live nondogmatically by conforming "to the custom of our country and its laws and institutions."[107] Hume's political philosophy is sometimes read in this skeptical mode, as an instruction manual on how to live by custom, habit, and prevailing opinion without claiming to possess knowledge.[108] Even though Hume's common-life analysis of human affairs seems to prioritize custom and habit, he encouraged readers of the middling ranks not to suspend judgment and submit to prevailing opinion, but to apply the principles of cause and effect to their analysis of morals and politics. Hume may have defended the existing laws and institutions of Great Britain, but he defended them on an entirely different speculative basis. And it was on this speculative basis that he judged prevailing custom and opinion and provided recommendations for reform.

John Christian Laursen rightly observes: "Many of Hume's writings are efforts to change people's opinions about religion. He knew it would not be easy because of the accumulated weight of religious custom in both

practice and opinion. But if he had succeeded—and maybe he did in the long run, in self-described, more enlightened circles in modern times—it would have been a revolution in opinion, not at all a matter of conservatism."[109] But Hume's philosophy was not only revolutionary in matters of religion. On matters of religion, metaphysics, epistemology, economics, party politics, British history, and constitutionalism, Hume wanted to inspire a revolution in opinion. And he did.

Hume's *History* is by turns philosophical, revisionist, and polemical. As the previous examples indicate, Hume's science of man established a foundation for understanding the nature and end of the human person and of human society. Because of this application of the principles of the science of man to the *History*, he amended the popular narrative of Alfred the Great's merits. He transformed what was regarded as sin and iniquity, turning it into an economic, rather than Christian, concept. He conceived of civilization as the result not of religion or virtue, but of economic development.

It cannot be the case, then, as Livingston argued, that Hume provided "no philosophical foundations at all for judging the prejudices of common life independent of those very prejudices."[110] Hume's philosophical foundations led him to dismiss the idea that human beings are naturally political and religious animals. His philosophical foundations led him to reconceptualize the meaning of the good life and the good society. His notion of happiness caused him to judge certain beliefs, practices, and ways of life as superior to others. The way of life of a luxurious and commercial society was best, according to Hume, because it promoted the "increase and consumption of all the commodities, which serve to the ornament and pleasure of life, [and] are advantageous to society" (E-RA 272). National greatness and public happiness, for Hume, depended not on the balance of trade or the circulation of money within a nation, but on the industry and ingenuity of the people, that is, the "habits and way of living of the people" (E-Int 298). Happiness and economic gain, in this conception, are intertwined. And they constitute a way of life.

Hume is more properly situated among foundationalist liberal theorists, including Bentham, Mill, and Rawls. Still, it should not be forgotten that Hume's preference for authority over liberty and for maintaining the established government appear to many readers as unequivocally "conservative" in the modern sense of the term. That is because Hume's political science constitutes a watershed moment in the history of politi-

cal thought. And this is something Sheldon Wolin articulated in the mid-twentieth century. In Hume's day, Wolin remarked, "liberalism was becoming conservatized."[111] The upheavals of the seventeenth century had reshaped society, resulting in the post-1688 order in Great Britain. Lockean liberalism had gone from being a challenger of the prevailing order to constituting the prevailing order. And this is the order Hume wanted to maintain. In the same way that Hume conservatized liberalism, though, he liberalized conservatism.

Both the political Left and Right as they have been defined following the French Revolution are the inheritors of the same liberal vision. That is, the modern political Left and Right inhabit the same imaginative universe, one that departs from the classical, Christian conception of the person and that measures civilization by its advancement beyond the past. This is why modern "liberals" and "conservatives" can claim Hume as one of their own. The French Right, for example, could claim Hume because he articulated a particular version of the defense of the establishment and of moderate reform that they found useful when debating against revolutionaries. But to use Hume in this way, the writers on the French Right had to forget about Hume's metaphysical foundations, particularly his irreligion. The only way to interpret Hume as a conservative, in other words, was to strip his political analysis of all its foundations. To strip political analysis of its philosophic foundations, though, is to define conservatism differently, to make it modern. This kind of conservatism is safe for a liberal world. It does not demand too much. It only demands that change take place slowly. It no longer defends the intellectual, spiritual, moral, and political heritage of the West, exemplified in the revelation of God in Jerusalem, the metaphysics and ethics of Athens, and the republicanism of Rome. Instead, conservatism is reduced to a narrow focus on the present, an antipathy toward the past, and a fear of rapid change. Clinging to the present, it denounces any radical proposal designed to dismantle the established order.

It is not entirely right, however, to call Hume's political vision modern, because the metaphysical, epistemological, and moral elements of that vision are familiar in Western intellectual history. His political vision is constituted by the web of ideas native to the ancient Epicurean framework. As Daniel MacQueen (d. 1777), a minister in Edinburgh, observed, "the principles of irreligion" in Hume's *History* are reminiscent of those "of the Epicurean sect" that inevitably swipe at the "foundations of piety."[112]

What Hume conservatized, then, was a liberal vision of society that privileged the Epicurean, that is, the anti-Socratic, vantage point. This same privileging of the Epicurean vision—of the *utile* and the *dulce* over the *honestum*—is a standard component of the foundationalist liberalism not only of Benthamite utilitarianism, but also of Rawlsian political liberalism, which is the subject of chapter 6.

SIX

# Hume, Political Liberalism, and the Reign of "Public Reason"

Hume's writings were well known in America, in the colonial era and into the early years of the nineteenth century. If Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), one of America's leading theologians, judged correctly, then Hume's irreligious ideas were influential, particularly among the youth in the American colonies. Edwards, who was the third president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), described Hume, in a letter to a fellow clergyman, as a man "of considerable genius," albeit an author of "corrupt books," responsible for some of the "notions that prevail in our nation."[1] Mark G. Spencer, an expert on Hume's early reception in the colonies, states that Hume's American critics "lamented the American popularity and influence of Hume's philosophical writings. They were especially concerned about Hume's impact on students attending America's colleges. . . . When American writers attacked Hume's philosophy, they did so because Hume's philosophy was being read."[2] A Philadelphia writer, for example, complained that Hume's books were "in the hands of almost all young persons." Another American, Joseph Dennie, declared he was "fully sensible, that by many of the [Harvard College] students Hume is admired."[3]

Nearly two centuries later, another generation of Harvard students was schooled in Hume's philosophy, in the form of John Rawls's undergraduate lectures on morals and politics. When articulating his theory of justice as fairness, Rawls, who resurrected social contract theory in the 1970s, clearly leaned on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). But Rawls's conception of justice and society, like Kant's before, bore the imprint of Hume's innovative contributions to the contractarian imagination.

In Rawls's lectures on moral and political thought, he turned to Hobbes, Hume, and Kant, among others, to trace the central philosophical developments underlying his liberal conception of justice. This chapter considers the philosophical assumptions that inform the idea of justice, society, and "public reason," which Rawls thought pervaded the culture of Western liberal democracies. These assumptions, which have shaped the modern political imagination, particularly in the Anglophone world, orient the way we think and speak about political life. The aim of this chapter is to ponder how the conception of justice and society that Rawls used as the foundation of his political liberalism drew not only from Kantian but also Humean insights. These latter insights are central to the Rawlsian political doctrine that has predominated in Britain and the United States for the last half century.

## THE VARIETIES AND USES OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* altered the course of modern political philosophy, setting the tone for the discipline after its publication. From 1961 until his retirement in 1995, Rawls taught popular undergraduate courses at Harvard. One, an introductory undergraduate course on ethics, focused on the history of moral philosophy and included several lectures on Hume. In the 1980s and 1990s, Rawls devoted more than half of this course to an explication of Kant's moral constructivism, an approach to ethics that informed Rawls's own project and resulting book by the same name, *Political Liberalism*, which was an updated presentation of Rawls's theory of justice as fairness. It explained how the theory of justice might be agreed upon by all citizens who, in a pluralistic democracy, hold reasonable, though irreconcilable, doctrines of religion and the good. The other course, Modern Political Philosophy, consisted of lectures on liberalism's "main historical figures," including Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Mill, and "one of its great-

est critics," Marx. Rawls dedicated approximately half of this course to an explanation of his own theory of justice.

Early on, in both courses, Rawls distributed handwritten lecture notes to his students. He eventually began typing them up. And roughly a decade after his teaching career concluded, his lectures were incorporated into two volumes: *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (2000) and *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (2007), which contain lectures that detail Rawls's interpretation of justice, the social contract, and moral psychology, all of which informed his major writings, *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*. These lectures helped shape the moral and political thought of a generation of students at Harvard.

In his introductory remarks for his course Modern Political Philosophy, Rawls commented on the role of political philosophy in a constitutional democracy. He located political philosophy in "the general background culture of a democratic society." Here, political philosophy serves "an educational role." He acknowledged that "classic texts" sometimes enter the "public political culture," forming "part of public lore" and establishing "a fund of society's basic political ideas."[4] Two of these basic ideas, the state of nature and the social contract, were expressed in the classic texts of Hobbes (*Leviathan*) and Locke (*Second Treatise*), two people on whom Rawls lectured.[5] He admitted, of course, that Hobbes did not invent the idea of the social contract. The Greeks did.[6] It is an ancient idea.

When teaching his students how to think philosophically about politics, Rawls described a particular type of political philosophy, a "liberal" one, which, as he explicitly remarked, is not "Platonic." This liberal, rather than Platonic, political philosophy is not oriented toward the discovery of "basic truths."[7] Instead, by taking for granted "everyday democratic politics," it "plays a role in strengthening the roots of democratic thought and attitudes." In this case, liberal political philosophy inhabits the general background culture of society and trains citizens up in the way they should go, at least politically, in a manner that prepares them for life in a constitutional democracy. It educates them in "certain ideal conceptions of person and political society before they come to politics."[8] In this way, liberal political philosophy provides individuals with the basic political principles and ideals they must understand if they are to be good democratic citizens.

Rawls explained that political philosophy plays a practical role by revealing what human beings, living in the same political society, might

agree upon, philosophically and morally. In other words, political philosophy teaches citizens how to cooperate with one another based on shared beliefs about life and how it ought to be lived, at least in the public political realm. In this way, political philosophy, which dwells within the background culture, shapes the political imagination. It orients people toward shared aims and purposes. It provides a narrative about the origins and aims of society that, when shared, makes social cooperation possible.[9] Liberal political philosophy, specifically, illuminates what might serve as a shared conception of justice and society in a democratic regime.

There are two strands of liberalism: the utilitarian strand and the social contract strand. In the 1970s, Rawls revived social contract theory after the dominance of utilitarianism in Anglophone moral and political philosophy in the previous century. According to contractarian doctrine, a political order is legitimate when each member of society, with good reason, can be said to agree to it, on the condition that others agree to it too.[10] Utilitarian doctrine, on the other hand, judges a political order not in terms of whether it generates agreement, but in terms of whether it promotes the general good of society. Rawls observed that "the notion of promises, or of origins, or of contracts do not enter into the utilitarian view in any way."[11]

When specifying the content of liberal political theory, Rawls supposed that a liberal conception of justice typically consists of the following: (1) a body of rights protections (e.g., the right to property and freedom of movement); (2) a priority of liberty over other considerations (e.g., advancing the general welfare); and (3) a commitment to provide adequate means—such as income, wealth, education, and health care—by which to make use of rights and liberties.

Not every liberal thinker, of course, was committed to these elements to the same degree. Hume, for example, believed free market mechanisms would supply citizens with a continually increasing store of goods for the improvement and enjoyment of life. Hume's liberal doctrine of limited government entrusted economic rather than governmental mechanisms with the task of maximizing social output and achieving a just distribution of goods. After the industrial revolution, though, many liberals turned their attention to ways in which the redistribution of wealth by a centralized administrative state might alleviate rampant inequality and relieve debilitating poverty among the lower classes.[12]

The list of basic rights promoted by liberal political thinkers has not remained static, either. For example, as the institutions of representative democracy developed in the nineteenth century, British liberals pushed for more extensive suffrage. This broadened and strengthened the body of rights protections defended by liberal theorists. In this case, the removal of obstacles to the right to vote became central to the liberal agenda. Unquestionably, then, liberal political theory has evolved, and its priorities have shifted from the defense of economic rights to the defense of civil and political rights as society has developed.

When Rawls was writing in the late twentieth century, he articulated a liberal theory of justice capable of garnering unanimous consent and justifying a more expansive welfare state. Rawls's theory of justice provided a theoretical foundation for an active government designed to achieve an egalitarian distribution of primary goods—such as income and basic respect—necessary for each individual citizen to make full use of his liberty. Rawls's liberal theory of justice combined a *body of negative rights*—establishing a sphere of individual thought and action free from government intervention—with a *body of positive rights*—enabling the government to provide citizens with a sufficient level of basic goods. In Rawls's day, the political environment in the United States had been shaped by the New Deal (1930s) and the Great Society (1960s). The international political environment, meanwhile, had been shaped by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). By reconciling negative and positive rights, Rawls reflected the spirit of the age, and united the aims of the two strands of liberalism, the social contract strand, which aims to protect liberty, and the utilitarian strand, which aims to advance the general welfare, or the happiness of the greatest number. In a sense, he straddled both traditions, using a contractarian framework to advance utilitarian ends, but he remained adamantly opposed to a monistic conception of the good, according to which there is a single standard by which to measure happiness in society.[13]

Rawls was not the only liberal thinker who combined elements of both traditions. Hume did, too. And it may be said that Hume used utilitarian language to promote contractarian ends. In Rawls's *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, he presented Hobbes and Locke as authors in the social contract tradition and Hume and Mill as authors in the utilitarian tradition.[14] Hume, of course, predated Bentham and Mill, who were

responsible for the robust elaboration of utilitarian doctrine. There is no doubt that Hume's account of utility helped determine the future course of that doctrine. But for Hume, utility served as an indication of the happiness of each individual, not a formula for the maximization of aggregate happiness. Furthermore, utility for Hume did not exist as some objective standard out there in the world. Instead, utility was sensed, or felt. Utility was not something with real independent existence, but something perceived by the moral sentiment. Hume combined two elements of the Epicurean tradition: a contractarian origin story and the moral standard of the *utile*.

Hume used utilitarian language without departing from the imaginative universe of the social contract. Rawls indicated as much in his lecture on Hume's "Of the Original Contract." Hume clearly attacked Locke's contractarian explanation of obligation, but he left Locke's theory of legitimacy alone. And, according to Rawls, Hume did "not even seem to be aware" that the Lockean social contract criterion and Hume's principle of utility, though clearly different, did not seem to produce any notable difference regarding the kinds of regimes their respective standards would legitimize.[15] Rawls explained that, from Hume's perspective, Locke's system of equal rights was an "unnecessary shuffle," since one could arrive at the same conclusion as Locke, when judging a regime's legitimacy, by referring solely to utility.[16]

In the *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, moreover, Rawls acknowledged that "an agreement among the members of society" is central to Hume's narrative of the origin of the laws of justice. And "although [in Hume's account] there is, and has been, no promise, it is still true that, just as in the case of a promise, each of our actions is taken with reference to the actions we expect of others."[17] The conventions of justice and government, then, acquire their legitimacy from publicly acknowledged and expressed agreement that they advance common, or mutual, interest. Hume's account of justice and government in the *Treatise* reflects contractarian, rather than utilitarian, assumptions, insofar as it focuses on the origins of these conventions and the manner in which they generate agreement. These concerns, as Rawls confirmed, belong more to the contractarian tradition than the utilitarian one. And Rawls, too, noticed that Hume adhered to the Hobbesian idea that "there is no such thing as property in a state of nature and so no such thing as justice or injustice in that state."[18] Hume occupies a distinctive place in the history of political thought, then,

inhabiting a transition period between social contract theory and utilitarian theory and incorporating elements of both in his writing.

Philosophers in the liberal tradition, including Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and Rawls, who shared the overarching framework of the state of nature and the social contract, differed in many of their specific doctrines and aims. They each wrote at different times for different purposes. Hobbes, writing during the English civil wars, used the social contract to argue that everyone has sufficient reason to defend the existing sovereign, insofar as the sovereign is effective in promoting peace, safety, and commodious living, since the alternative to life in awe of sovereign power is the state of nature, which is a state of war characterized by fear of violent death. Locke, writing during the Exclusion Crisis, used the social contract to argue that legitimate government requires the consent of free and equal individuals, who, through the power of the Commons, possess the right to resist the Crown when the abuse of royal prerogative threatens the integrity of the mixed constitution. The "idea of the social contract," as Rawls remarked, clearly "can have a very different meaning and use, given its role within a political conception as a whole."[19]

Hume, like Locke, used elements of social contract theory to argue in defense of Great Britain's mixed constitution. But Hume sought to legitimize not only a form of government, but a way of life, specifically, a commercial way of life as it developed in the half century or so following the Glorious Revolution. To the extent that Hume contributed to contractarian doctrine, he did so by naturalizing the idea of the contract. He described conventions as a natural agreement, analogous to a contract, rooted in *something like* a promise. Hume, then, used his moral psychology to show how human beings agreed—and should continue to agree—to a system of general rules, sanctioned by government, designed to promote mutual advantage through commercial transactions.

Kant, meanwhile, developed a social contract theory that is both hypothetical and nonhistorical. Kant regarded the social contract as "an *idea* of reason" to be used as "the test of rightfulness of every public law."[20] In this case, the legislator should employ the idea of the social contract to determine whether all members of society, who are free and equal, rational and reasonable, would agree that a law is just.

Rawls used the social contract in a slightly different manner. The social contract, in his work, serves as a thought experiment by which to generate

agreement on a political conception of justice. This liberal conception of justice is designed to guide public political decision-making in a constitutional democracy. Rawls's social contract theory refers, in its initial situation, not to a state of nature (as in Locke), a primitive condition (as in Hume), or to all rational members of society (as in Kant), but to an "original position" in which individuals, residing behind a "veil of ignorance," adopt principles of justice that, when applied to the basic structure of society, establish "fair terms of social cooperation."[21] The veil of ignorance prevents the parties in the original position from possessing knowledge of their specific situations (e.g., height, weight, talent, skills, life prospects, family history, ethnicity, race, religion, marital status). Rawls's theory of justice as fairness also restricts what qualifies as "public reasoning," that is, the reasons that can be offered by citizens to other citizens in order to justify public political coercion.

Rawls's account of public reason requires that citizens in a pluralistic society abide by the duty of civility by using language that is understood and shared by all citizens when arguing in defense of public law and policy. Citizens in the public political sphere, who are deliberating on public matters, are to use language that does not depend on their sincerely held beliefs, that is, the broader moral, religious, or philosophical doctrines to which they adhere. Instead, citizens are to speak to one another in accord with the political conception of justice—the theory of justice as fairness—that Rawls described as strictly political, that is, distinct from any overarching worldview or comprehensive doctrine of the good. Rawls contended that this strictly political, liberal conception of justice could garner overlapping consensus among people adhering to a wide variety of reasonable belief systems precisely because it was tied to no one specific doctrine of life and of the good. Thus, Rawls's political liberalism is designed to foster consensus on a liberal conception of justice given the fact of reasonable pluralism.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF A "STRICTLY POLITICAL" SOCIAL CONTRACT

The central component of Rawls's political liberalism is the idea that the liberal conception of justice and society is itself disconnected from any one philosophical worldview. In other words, the liberal conception of justice and society, which is derived from social contract theory, relies on no sin-

gle theological, metaphysical, or moral doctrine. Interestingly, though, Rawls, who began his Modern Political Philosophy course with lectures on Hobbes, subscribed to a controversial interpretation of the place of philosophy in Hobbes's social contract theory. Rawls began his lectures on the social contract by *assuming* that Hobbes's theological and metaphysical doctrines could be detached from his idea of the social contract.[22]

A brief look at the content of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, though, is sufficient to challenge Rawls's interpretation that Hobbes's social contract—and the modern social contract, in general—can be freed from any supporting philosophical doctrine. The first part of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, on which Rawls focused his lectures, provides an extended description of human motivation—of the springs and principles of thought and action—based on a mechanistic-materialist conception of the human person. In the third and fourth parts of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes interpreted the Hebrew and Christian scriptures in accord with his philosophical materialism. At the same time, he took a sledgehammer to Scholastic Aristotelianism. Scholastic Aristotelianism, which predominated in Hobbes's day, provided a defense of the dualistic understanding of man, consisting of the unity of body and soul, and of society, consisting of temporal power and spiritual power. And this conception of the person and of society undergirded the classical Christian approach to politics.

The second part of Hobbes's *Leviathan* delineates the principles of the commonwealth with reference to the social contract. This contractarian argument relies on other arguments made in *Leviathan*. For example, the argument that individuals should subject themselves to the earthly sovereign depends on Hobbes's argument that individuals should fear the prospect of violent death more than the fires of hell. It also depends on Hobbes's argument that, since only bodies exist, there is no reason to fear malevolent spiritual entities or to entreat priests to serve as spiritual intermediaries. Hobbes's attempt to draw his readers' attention to physical, rather than spiritual, reality strengthened his plea to invest all power—even over religious doctrine—in the sovereign.

Rawls acknowledged that, for Hobbes, the "lack of a proper philosophical (scientific) method," such as that represented by "the Schools (Aristotle via scholasticism)," made for defective human reasoning.[23] And Hobbes's argument that the people should submit to the effective sovereign, who has proven capable of keeping the state of nature at bay,

demands that his readers reason rightly, freed, that is, from religious superstition. This makes sense of the fact that Hobbes wanted *Leviathan* to serve as the textbook for public life, since it provided the only public philosophy that he thought suitable for peaceful coexistence in one of the most turbulent eras in England's history. Hobbes portrayed his political science, as presented in *Leviathan*, as right thinking about public matters. And the right thinking evident in *Leviathan* was grounded in philosophical materialism, which Hobbes used as the basis for his understanding of man, morals, religion, and politics.

From this perspective, Hobbes's philosophy is a unified system. His mechanism and materialism, in this case, are inseparable from his moral and political doctrine. Nevertheless, Rawls contended that Hobbes's political theory was "self-contained, and independent of theological assumptions and principles of mechanics (materialism)." And Rawls argued, in general, that the "ideas of the State of Nature and of the Social Contract can stand on their own feet" without reference to, or dependence on, a doctrine of "mechanism and materialism."[24]

Rawls acknowledged that representatives of Christian "Orthodoxy," such as Ralph Cudworth, accused Hobbes of articulating atheism, materialism, determinism, an individualist conception of the state and society, relativism, and subjectivism. These doctrines challenged the main tenets of Christian "Orthodoxy" in every respect. Philosophers, such as Cudworth, who rebuked Hobbes, defended opposite doctrines, namely, theism, mind–body dualism (if not Aristotelian hylomorphism), free will, a corporate conception of the state and society, and eternal and immutable morality.[25]

But Rawls thought the orthodox response to Hobbes badly missed the mark. According to Rawls, Hobbes's political doctrine did not rely at all on metaphysical, philosophical, or theological positions. Hobbes's atheism, from Rawls's perspective, did not orient his political theory. Nor did his materialism. Nor did his determinism. Rawls supposed that "these background notions" did not inform "the formal structure nor the material content of Hobbes's doctrine." Rawls admitted, however, that his interpretation was "debatable." In fact, Rawls said, "I don't argue the point." Instead, Rawls declared, "I assume that Hobbes's Social Contract doctrine as presented in this work can be fully understood apart from any theological or religious view." And as a result, Rawls left "aside Hobbes's materialism and his other metaphysical theses."[26] This point, not argued for, but merely assumed by Rawls, rests on the belief that politics follows its own logic, that

the social contract can be separated from a broader philosophical framework. Rawls assumed he could easily separate Hobbes's polemical attack against the classical Christian tradition from his social contract theory.

Rawls assumed, that is, that politics exists as a separate sphere, detachable from theology and metaphysics. It is reasonable to opine that Rawls's assumption would have been just as likely to attract the ire of Christian orthodoxy in the seventeenth century as Hobbes's atheistic materialism had. Cudworth supposed that good politics required sound philosophy. Hobbes held the same position. Rawls, by claiming to remove philosophy from the picture, opted for a kind of political agnosticism. But Rawls's "impartiality" would have seemed just as revolutionary—just as atheistic—as Hobbes's mechanistic-materialism, because it casts God out of the moral and political universe. As the greatest critics of Hobbes and Hume in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries understood, one cannot remain agnostic on the matter. One must take sides.

## POLITICS WITHOUT GOD: BREAKING FROM THE WESTERN TRADITION

Rawls presented his theory of justice as fairness as a constructivist view, analogous to Kant's project of moral constructivism. The *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* include a series of lectures on Kant, whose moral constructivism consisted of a procedure by which individuals might make their own moral laws, and in so doing, become autonomous agents, by submitting their wills to no law except that which they make for themselves, in accordance with the principles of practical reason. This procedure describes how individuals construct the moral law. Rawls applied Kantian moral constructivism to the political realm. He described how we create our own political morality, namely, the principles of justice. In his procedure, hypothetical representatives in the original position, behind a veil of ignorance, choose principles of justice that apply to the basic structure of society and guide public political decision-making. Rawls's political liberalism transferred Kantian moral constructivism to the political realm. In this case, the political world, like the moral world, is our own creation.

Rawls ascertained that Kant broke "with the long tradition of Western metaphysics and theology" by sharply distinguishing between theoretical and practical reasoning. Rawls's claim, then, that Hobbes's social contract

was separable from metaphysical and theological views, reflected a Kantian viewpoint, which Rawls acknowledged as a critique of the classical Christian tradition. Rawls operated on the Kantian position that "the reasonable belief in God has no role in physics, and the God of physics, the God of the physico-teleological proof, has no role in practical faith," that is, in practical reasoning about morals and politics.[27]

For Rawls, free and equal individuals aim for autonomy in the public political realm, just as, for Kant, free and equal individuals aim for autonomy in the moral realm. The achievement of autonomy, however, requires "that there exists no moral order prior and independent of those conceptions that determine the form of the procedure that specifies the content of the duties of justice and of virtue."[28] To preserve individual autonomy in moral and political life, then, there must be no "prior and independent order of moral values."[29] There can be no "given moral order of values," whether existing in the form of "Platonic Ideas" or "ideas lying in the divine reason" or in "an order of nature, or the constitution of human nature."[30] As the makers of our own laws, we, to maintain autonomy, must not subject our wills to nature, divine reason, or any law we cannot claim to have made for ourselves.

Kant supposed, as Rawls did, that "different agents . . . have different conceptions of their happiness" that depend on "the contingencies of our life and on the particular modes of thought and feeling we have developed as we come of age."[31] Happiness, in other words, varies with personal taste. And we are "rational," according to this terminology, insofar as we can use reason instrumentally to further our individual happiness as determined by our interests or desires.[32]

This is the starting point for Rawls's political liberalism, namely, that rational individuals possessing different conceptions of happiness and the good life stand in need of reasonable rules of conduct, on which they can all agree, to coordinate their individual pursuits. But to generate agreement on the rules of conduct, the rules themselves must not be drawn from different conceptions of happiness and the good life, on which people do not—and cannot—agree.

The project of moral and political constructivism, for Kant and Rawls, respectively, rests on a conception of individuals as "free and equal legislating members" of the moral and political order.[33] These individuals, if they are to enjoy autonomy, must not be bound by an external law—

a prior and independent moral order—but only by the law they give themselves. This doctrine of autonomy, as Rawls noted, would have struck an early modern Christian theorist, such as Samuel Clarke, as "a radical and alarming doctrine."[34]

Hume's moral theory, meanwhile, was directed above all against moral realists such as Clarke. Hume's critiques of Clarke and of natural law theory extended Hobbes's attack on the idea of an eternal and immutable moral order. These critiques culminated in Bentham's declaration that the idea of natural law and natural rights is "nonsense on stilts." As Neil McArthur rightly argues, "Bentham and other positive thinkers drew on [Hume's] arguments in their effort to demolish the natural law tradition. Natural law theory was the dominant mode of legal thought during Hume's era, and his contribution to its eclipse should not go unnoticed."[35] Hume's use of the Epicurean idiom—also evident in the writings of Hobbes and Bentham—provided the conceptual tools necessary to establish a shared conception of moral and political life that does not depend on the existence of a divine lawgiver or an eternal and immutable natural law.

According to the renowned historian of ideas Istvan Hont, eighteenth-century philosophers interpreted modern positions as revivals of ancient views. They used the ancient philosophical schools as "proxy terms" for describing modern ideas on morals and sociability. When Adam Smith lectured on the history of moral philosophy at Glasgow in the 1750s, for example, he began by outlining Stoic and Epicurean positions as expressed in Cicero's *De finibus*. Immanuel Kant began his *Lectures on Ethics* in Königsberg in the same way. According to Hont, philosophers in this period attached the label "Epicureanism" to "the concept of the state of nature and its derivatives," including weak sociability and the development of justice and society in accord with utility.[36]

In the Epicurean conception of moral and political life, human beings, who begin in a primitive condition, create a moral and legal order that advances their mutual interests. This narrative, according to which humankind transitioned from a primitive condition to a civilized one, by means of artificial socialization mechanisms allowing naturally unsocial individuals to peacefully pursue their interests and desires in society, is rooted in a phenomenon described by Kant as "unsocial sociability." Kant, in accord with his theory of "unsocial sociability," articulated something like a horizontal, Epicurean account of moral development.[37] That is, Kant

subscribed to a theory of human history, as Rawls described it in his lectures, as "progressively improving, and not becoming steadily worse."

The formation of moral and public order within constitutional democratic states had, according to Kant, provided the groundwork for material, moral, and cultural progress.[38] This progress of society could be preserved through the maintenance of institutions that made possible the kind of modern liberty enjoyed in free, constitutional democratic states. There are similarities between this narrative of society's advancement and Hume's own.

Hume and Kant each conceived of human beings as their own masters. Hume's doctrine, though, was oriented more toward libertinism than autonomy. According to David Wootton, the term "libertine" was "used from the mid-sixteenth century to refer to those who refused to recognize their subjection to God but thought of themselves as their own masters. Libertines were believed to deny that they were subject to the law of God and thus to recognize only practical constraints on the pursuit of pleasure."[39] Libertinism in Hume, however, corresponds to the notion of autonomy in Kant. Kant can be distinguished from Hume insofar as he posited that human beings can regulate the pursuit of pleasure in accordance with the principles of practical reason. And Kant described the morally virtuous person as one possessing a good will, rather than, as Hume did, as one displaying character traits useful and agreeable to himself and others. In the final analysis, though, both believed that, for human beings to be free, they must be their own masters.

The differences between Humean and Kantian philosophy outweigh the similarities. Nevertheless, there are problems with the conventional wisdom that Kant refuted Hume without absorbing any of his doctrines.[40] According to Manfred Kuehn, this traditional interpretation overlooks the ways in which Kant neutralized Hume's skepticism, in part, by incorporating it into his own philosophy.[41] Kant, like Hume, thought that human beings could only know the appearances of things, not the things themselves. And in Kant's system, as in Hume's, one is barred from making the leap from matters of fact and existence to knowledge of God. Kant was as skeptical of natural theology as Hume was.

Kant famously stated that Hume's philosophy "first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave a wholly different direction to my inquiries in the field of speculative philosophy."[42] An American, Alexander Hill Ever-

ett (1790–1847), who studied law under John Quincy Adams at Harvard College, reviewed Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1839.[43] In his review, Everett described how Kant accepted some of the main tenets of Hume's skeptical empiricism: "The name of [Kant's] Transcendentalism seems to imply, that it is the scheme of a higher philosophy, rising above the objects of sense, and over-leaping the narrow limits within which the exercise of our faculties had formerly been confined; when, in fact, its leading doctrine is, that our knowledge is necessarily restricted to objects within the domain of experience,—that all super-sensual ideas are to us characterless and devoid of meaning, and in attempting to *cognize* them the reason is involved in endless contradictions."[44]

For Kant, as for Hobbes, Hume, and other thinkers in the contractarian-conventionalist tradition, the world is despiritualized. Philosophical inquiry is restricted to the domain of experience. Philosophy is freed from superstition. Our sights are turned toward the earth and away from heaven. Having turned our backs on *logos*, divine reason, natural law, and a preexisting and permanent order of moral values, we create our own laws. The only limit, in the liberal tradition in which Hume and Kant operate, is that which is established by the consent of individuals, each of whom reliably pursues his rational advantage.[45] Individuals in political society are thereby tasked with creating rules of the game that will help them further their interests to the greatest extent possible in community with others.[46] And this is the approach to justice and society assumed by Rawls in *Political Liberalism*.

## POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND THE FLIGHT FROM THE *HONESTUM*

From this perspective, society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, a game in which human beings create rules as a means by which to achieve a shared end.[47] And that end is mutual advantage. That which constitutes an individual's advantage is subjectively determined. Rawls wrote, "The idea of social cooperation requires an idea of each participant's rational advantage, or good . . . when the scheme is viewed from their own standpoint."[48] The idea of mutual advantage, what Hume called *utility*, is at the core of Rawlsian political liberalism. Individuals adhere to the political conception of justice on the assumption that everyone else will do the

same, so that everyone will benefit from the scheme of cooperation. The principles of justice are established to advance the interests of the parties involved.[49]

Rawls's definition of society as "a fair system of cooperation between free and equal citizens as reasonable and rational," which is fundamental to political liberalism, is based on the philosophical perspective that, since there is no natural law, no prepolitical moral code, a just society is one that is based on consent regarding mutually advantageous schemes of cooperation.[50] In conceiving of society in such a manner, Rawls replicated liberalism's founding myth, according to which individuals with no "prior and independent principles of right and justice" determining their choices, create the terms of justice.[51] Rather than arguing for this position, that is, his understanding of society and justice, Rawls assumed it, taking this contractarian "idea" as something "implicit in the public culture of a democratic society."[52]

Rawls's purpose in articulating his version of political liberalism was to establish principles of justice and a shared language of public reason that could be used to justify the exercise of public political coercion given the fact of reasonable pluralism, that is, the disagreements about virtue, morality, religion, and the good life that Rawls called a basic feature of democracy. According to Rawls, "Citizens realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines," because of what Rawls called the "burdens of judgment."[53] Public reason liberalism thereby strives to prevent individuals from imposing their comprehensive philosophical, moral, and religious views on others through social and political institutions. This imposition of philosophical views on others by means of political force violates the equality of concern or respect to which each individual is due.[54] Each individual, according to Rawls, has a duty of civility, at least in the public political forum, to communicate in the language of public reason when speaking to other citizens.[55]

Rawlsian political liberalism assumes that, because of the fact of reasonable pluralism, political coercion is justifiable only when it aims toward "a shared idea of rational advantage."[56] The "common human reason" on which Rawls based his brand of public reason, however, is that same instrumental reason to which modern Epicureans so powerfully gave voice, which serves primarily as a means by which to achieve whatever it is

human beings desire. Contemporary political liberalism, in fact, captures one of the defining traits of the Epicurean tradition of moral and political thought, namely, the flight from the *honestum*. According to Rawls, government cannot "advance human excellence, or the values of perfection," because beliefs about human excellence vary and none "is affirmed by citizens generally."[57] Human reason, moreover, is unable "to distinguish the true beliefs [about the good] from the false."[58] "To find a shared idea of citizens' good," Rawls did not look toward the truth, that is, the *honestum*, that which is noble, or good, in itself. In fact, Rawls famously claimed that "the political conception [of justice] does without the concept of truth."[59] Instead, "political liberalism looks for an idea of rational advantage."[60] Lactantius's critique of Epicurus, that he elevated utility over truth, is thereby equally applicable to Rawls.

Rational advantage, or the *utile*, is, of course, as Rawls admitted, determined by subjective preference, which is to say, personal taste, or what seems most pleasant to any single individual depending on his or her temperament. Rawls portrayed different conceptions of the good as convictions. And "the strength of a conviction," Rawls declared, "[does not argue] for its truth."[61] Rawls equated various ways of life with various "wants and desires," various "sentiments and commitments," all of which are equally justifiable as long as they are reasonable, that is, not because they are based on good reasons, but because they do not violate the rights and liberties of other people.[62] Common human reason, from the perspective of Rawlsian political liberalism, is precisely that which charts the course toward the achievement of aims determined by *desires*, or *interests*. Rawlsian political liberalism thereby confines political discourse to the language of the *utile*. It expels arguments about prepolitical moral facts—that is, the *honestum*—from public political discourse and from the domain of public reason.

From this perspective, it is consistent with a person's natural liberty to pursue happiness in his own way, since he is psychologically determined to enjoy certain pleasures more than others and has no objective standard, grounded in a teleological understanding of nature, by which to gauge the suitability of his desires or the desires of others. This conception of freedom undoubtedly rests on the supposition (alien to both classical and modern variations of Stoicism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism) that there is no universal human essence ascertainable by human reason that can help us define freedom in relation to proper human ends.[63] Rawls adopted

the same perspective when he claimed that the idea of mutual advantage, which is the end of political society, precludes ideas of goodness, excellence, or perfection, drawn from the classical philosophical and Christian traditions, from being incorporated into public law or public speech. As a result, the language of the *honestum* is rejected. In fact, any mention of the *honestum*—of perfection, goodness, or excellence—is construed as illiberal.

Undoubtedly, political liberalism possesses a standard by which to determine what kind of speech is liberal and what kind of speech is illiberal. This standard may appear "strictly political," insofar as it derives from recognition of the burdens of judgment, which make it difficult for human beings to agree on what is good in life. But this standard, employed by political liberalism to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate public speech, is more than political. It is philosophical. It is based on epistemological assumptions, that is, assumptions about what we can know and how. It is based on moral assumptions, regarding what is good. It is based on political assumptions, regarding the end of society. Only those arguments that accord with liberal assumptions on these matters are welcomed into public political discourse and recognized as arguments consistent with "public reason."

Political liberalism, by disqualifying the language of the *honestum*, disqualifies the entire philosophical framework associated with the classical Socratic and Christian traditions. Public political life, in this way, is purged of an entire way of thinking informed by classical Greek metaphysics, Hebrew and Christian theology, and classical Roman republicanism. Specifically, it excludes from public speech normative conceptions of the human person as a rational and political being. It excludes from public speech the conception of the human person as a unity of body and soul and of human society as consisting of two powers, physical and spiritual. It excludes from public speech classical republicanism's moral framework, which judges political regimes according to virtue and decline and which promotes civil religion and laws that further the common good by curbing libertinism.

Public deliberation by citizens in the public square, from a classical standpoint, should consist in free reason-giving not only about means but also about ends. These ends, ideally, would accord with *logos*, that is, the universal reason, to which classical philosophers suggest law should conform. Aristotle, for example, described law as "speech [*logos*] that proceeds from a certain prudence and intellect."[64] But for law to reflect this kind of

speech, consistent with prudence and intellect, public discourse needs to be given free reign. Only then might the *honestum* be located. Only through encountering—and countering—common opinions in the public square might we advance beyond conflicting views to the attainment of some semblance of the truth.[65] Law that is not consistent with the truth, with the *honestum*, as Cicero stated, will fail both to unleash "the power latent in man" and to "improve [the mind] by instruction."[66]

Why does it matter if we adopt something like the ancient Epicurean formulation on morals? There was a rival, classical formulation, articulated by Cicero in book 3 of *On Duties*. Cicero argued that not everything that is useful is good, but everything that is good is useful. If that is true, if there are moral facts, and by our emphasis on the useful and the pleasant we are missing out on what is truly good, then we are shortchanging ourselves and we are not promoting happiness that Hume, no less than Aristotle, thought was the goal of public life.

## THE TYRANNY OF "PUBLIC REASON" LIBERALISM

Though political liberalism is designed to avoid moral—and philosophical—authoritarianism in the social political order, there is reason to believe it does not live up to its own ideals.[67] Scholars have begun questioning whether the requirements of public reason liberalism are themselves publicly justified.[68] Restrictions on public reason are the result of the development of liberal doctrine in the West, not the deliberative, rational, or considered choice of any concrete individuals trying to govern themselves in community. The restrictions on public reason, moreover, could be legitimately—that is, reasonably—rejected. And these restrictions almost surely would not produce universal consent if put to a vote. Nevertheless, political liberal doctrine, which is never approved by vote by actual people trying to promote the common good in their political communities, has the power to exclude a priori certain kinds of discourse—particularly that which derives from classical Socratic and classical Christian moral traditions—from entering the public political forum.[69]

Political theorists from within the tradition of political liberalism have expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which philosophical gatekeepers determine what does and does not qualify as public reason, which

arguments are or are not legitimate in public political deliberation.[70] By presenting political liberalism—and even its chief competitor in contemporary political theory, namely, political realism—as "strictly political," we ingrain even more deeply the moral and metaphysical assumptions harbored by liberal thought since its earliest moments of development and best expressed in the Enlightenment philosophy of Hume.

John Gray has made a similar point, arguing that the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment provided the first *comprehensive* statement of liberalism.[71] Bryan Garsten, moreover, has pointed out that public reason as we know it today derives from the efforts of early modern and modern philosophers to articulate an objective and impartial standard of justification for public coercion after the religious wars.[72] To detach justification from the Christian religion, though, philosophers had to cleanse the public political sphere from the classical Socratic philosophy with which Christian theology had been fused. And Hume was a vocal advocate of this philosophical project. The idea of public reason that resulted from this project has as its very motivating purpose the development of an alternative imaginative framework for thinking about morals and politics, one that does not depend on natural law or divine reason.

To free political thought from reference to natural law and divine reason, one must criticize human reason itself. And public reason today presumes the efficacy of a Humean critique of reason, particularly in the form of classical Socratic philosophy. As Harris writes, for Hume, "reason cannot tell us which desires should be satisfied, which passions should be acted upon, which appetites should be indulged. Philosophy can offer no special form of practical wisdom."[73] Hume was an early theorist of pluralism. He did not think reason could point human beings to particular ends constitutive of the good life. In this sense, he was an early predecessor of Rawls. The fact of pluralism, as it appears in Hume's work, "provides a ground," in Merrill's words, "for resisting the claimants to the title of wisdom."[74] The fact of pluralism, that is, leads the political liberal to turn a deaf ear to anyone claiming to have moral wisdom rooted in right reason.

Hume's treatment of philosophical pluralism as an inevitable fact about the world is the product of his critique of reason, his rejection of the idea that reason is capable of reconciling the differences between different viewpoints.[75] Hume's argument, like Rawls's, is not simply that we should temper reason for the sake of political concord—though that kind of practical consideration plays a large role—but that reason itself is incapable of

advancing us toward a more robust conception of the good life, because there is no such thing as the *honestum*, as the universal good for man, apart from considerations of pleasure and utility.

## RESTORING THE PLACE OF REASON IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Public reason today is the product of a comprehensive outlook that denigrates reason, diminishes its scope, and discounts its potential. The restrictions placed on what qualifies as public reason prevent progression toward a true government of speech (*logos*) based on what human beings share, which is not only material need, but also reason, particularly reason as applied to one of the most fundamental questions of all: What is the good life? If, as Hume suggested, all desire, all action, all law, and all government is directed toward the attainment of human happiness, then human beings necessarily must ask this question. After all, the answer to this question directs not only matters of personal decision-making and private education, but also of public education, insofar as law itself is an educator. It is by asking the question—*What is the good life?* or, in another form, *What is the good in life?*—that individual characters and political regimes, alike, are shaped. But political liberalism excludes such reasoning about ends, about what is good for the human being *qua* human being, because it holds no confidence in the ability of human beings to reason about ends coolly and civilly in a pluralistic environment. Reasoning about ends, though, is not only a source of dignity and fulfillment for rational animals, but it is also a community-builder, a way to form bonds of friendship and justice with others.

Perhaps one way to restore hope and social bonds is to return to the quest for the *honestum* and the rule of *honestum* in our communities. Reason, in the classical Socratic and Christian traditions, forms a bond between human beings of all classes, races, and ethnicities. It can also promote self-criticism, humility, and toleration—a check on self-righteousness—as the individual recognizes his benumbing inferiority before the vast and unsurpassable cosmos, and its governor, universal *logos*. It can also promote recognition of humanity's dignified state, for although the individual is made of dust, the individual shares in—and participates in—the same *logos* that directs the affairs of the universe. By reintroducing rational debate about moral ends in political life, we might foster conversations about what is befitting for human persons in light of their rational, social, spiritual, and

creative capacities, in a way that might ennoble human nature and place the passions—pleasure, love, desire—once more under the tutelage of reason, the divine part of man.

Hume described it as the greatest unhappiness to be placed in subservience to another person's conception of happiness. It might, however, be an even greater unhappiness to be deprived of opportunities to satisfy the natural inclination to engage in rational debate about moral ends, to deliberate about virtue and the best way to promote it, to share in the development of laws that we think suited to the kind of society we want to form in pursuit of happiness. As it is, political liberalism enforces its own conception of the good—according to which the good varies on a case-by-case basis and is subject to individual tastes and preferences. This, of course, is what has been described in this book as a modern variety of the ancient Epicurean moral system.

In the first century BC, Cicero, responding to the popularity of Epicurean doctrine, advocated for the retraining of the moral imagination. He advised that individuals make the effort, through self-reflection and good-faith deliberation, to distinguish between pleasure and moral worth. "If one should follow the former [that is, pleasure]," Cicero remarked, "many things fall in ruin, and especially fellowship with mankind, affection, friendship, justice and the rest of the virtues, none of which can exist unless they are disinterested, for virtue driven to duty by pleasure as a sort of pay is not virtue at all but a deceptive sham and pretence of virtue."[76] Cicero recognized the appeal of the Epicurean framework, of the Epicurean account of pleasure. He responded by subordinating pleasure to moral worth. "I see how sweetly pleasure flatters our senses," Cicero explained. "I am slipping into agreeing with Epicurus . . . [but] virtue calls me back, or rather plucks me back with her hand; she declares that those are the feelings of the beast of the field, she links the human being with god."[77]

The mere act of deliberating about moral ends in political community and using those deliberations to guide public decision-making might restore the perceived dignity—and divinity—of the human person and elevate the contemporary understanding of public reason, which is currently understood instrumentally, in service of that which is lowest, rather than highest, in man. And perhaps this would shift the Western political imagination—slowly, subtly—away from the rule of the *utile*, as expressed by the likes of Epicurus, Hume, and Rawls, and toward a return to the rule of *honestum*.

## UNCOVERING THE *HONESTUM* IN EARLY RESPONSES TO HUME

Hume's critique of reason is famous. He stated in the *Treatise* that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (T 2.3.3.4). George Anderson, though, who adhered to the classical Socratic conception of the human person, argued in the 1750s that it is reason, not passion, that points out what we ought to pursue and how. We determine that an object or action is good not according to utility or pleasure, but according to the *honestum*, that is, its fit with human nature. Proper moral judgment requires that we consider our nature, capacities, needs, and duties. "Esquire *Hume*," though, "makes man's capacity of being acted upon, his passions, perturbations, and affections, the sole guide, director, and commander of every step to be taken, in order to be happy." Anderson argued "that desire doth not make an object desirable, but it is desired because it is judged and understood to be desirable. My choice of a means of happiness doth not make it eligible, but I chuse it, because I know or believe that it is fit and expedient for the purpose."[78]

To withhold public judgment regarding what should and should not be pursued by human beings in political society is to stifle the voice of conscience. Lord Kames and Reid accused Hume of doing precisely that. Reid declared that Hume, by portraying justice as artificial, left conscience out of his political theory. Lord Kames agreed: "From the beginning to the end of the Enquiry, Mr Hume appears to have totally overlooked the innate sense of duty, that authority of conscience, which is a law to man, regulating his conduct in society."[79] For the same reason, Reid thought that Hume propounded an erroneous moral doctrine.

Conscience is oriented toward the discovery of a universal standard of judgment of which human beings themselves are not the author. But, as Reid observed, no one can entirely ignore the role and authority of conscience in social life, not even Hume. In the famous passage of the sensible knave, from Hume's second *Enquiry*, he admitted that it might be in an individual's self-interest to opt for injustice over justice. This "sensible knave," aware that he will "be a loser by his integrity," acts honestly when it suits him, but exempts himself from the rules of justice when "an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and confederacy." In other words, this sensible knave will strategically break the law for his own

advantage without putting the scheme of social cooperation at risk. Hume admitted that no reasoning could persuade such an individual from "treachery and roguery." Instead, the natural antipathy toward this behavior is the most effective curb to injustice, because "inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct; these are circumstances, very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man, who feels the importance of them" (EPM 9.22–23).

Reid argued that Hume, in this passage, described conscience as a natural principle leading us to approve of justice for its intrinsic worth, apart from utility or advantage. Reid suggested that Hume, in this case, ceded the controversy to his critics, the proponents of natural justice, who described justice as part of the natural order. By granting the authority of conscience, which testifies to the merit of justice apart from utility, Hume, in Reid's words, saw his "whole . . . laboured system . . . fall to the ground."[80] If human beings approve of justice and disapprove of injustice based on intrinsic worth rather than instrumental value, then, Reid suggested, Hume's account of justice would have to be jettisoned.

If conscience directs us toward what is just and unjust by nature, then conscience has a role in social and political life. It is conscience, as Reid stated, that helps individuals distinguish between right and wrong, that is, what is fit or unfit for the human person, in particular circumstances, based on a consideration of the human person's proper ends. "A good action in a man," Reid averred, "is that in which he applied his intellectual powers properly, in order to judge what he ought to do, and acted according to his best judgment."[81] Conscience enables us to know our duty, to God, to ourselves, and to others, and act accordingly.[82]

Conscience, for Reid, constituted the "touchstone of Morals," that which allowed individuals to approve of what is right and condemn what is wrong, provided that their judgment was not perverted by appetite or interest.[83] Moral judgment, on Reid's account, depended on the contemplative power of the mind, which illuminated the truth about the human person. But Reid regarded the speculative part of ethics as subservient to the active part. We seek to understand human nature through speculation, that is, so that we can recognize and carry out our duties, including the duties we have in public life.

In his lectures on practical ethics, delivered in the 1760s and 1770s, when he held the chair in moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow,

Reid declared, "The Dignity the Glory and Perfection of a Man consists in doing his duty and acting the Part that is Proper for him."[84] In a passage worth quoting in full, Reid said:

> It is the prerogative of Man in his adult state to be able to propose to himself and to prosecute one great End in Life & by this to reduce the whole of his Life to a connected System making every part of it subservient to his main End and regulating the whole of his conduct with a view to that. The brutes are incapable of this: They are necessarily carried away by the appetite or Instinct which is strongest at the time without any view more distant than its Gratification. We have a Superior Principle given us by the Author of our Being, by which we can, from an Eminence as it were, take a view of the whole Course of human Life; and consider the different Roads that men take. . . . When we thus take a general view of human Life we can not but perceive that some Roads we may take lead to Ruin and infamy, others are mean and below the dignity of our Natures; Prudence will direct us to chuse that which is most excellent in itself. . . . Nor can any Man who uses his Reason be in doubt which is the best. The noblest End we can pursue is to Act suitably to the Dignity of that Nature which God hath given us.[85]

Whereas, as Gordon Graham writes, Reid "beautifully conveys a vision of philosophy that immediately connects it with the tradition of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics," Hume rejected the Socratic notion that the primary moral category is that which is excellent in itself, the *honestum*.[86] The classical Socratic thinkers—who argued that human beings were bound together by common reason—believed that humans could locate the *honestum* by means of right reason.[87] From this perspective, individuals, by reasoning rightly, might understand the kinds of actions and moral characters that befit the human person understood as a rational, political, and even religious animal. As Cicero noted, "Everything honourable and seemly is derived from this [understanding of common human nature], and from it we discover a method of finding our duty."[88] Cicero, in a passage quoted by Reid when he tried to articulate what was missing from Hume's theory, wrote, "By 'moral' [that is, *honestum*] then, I mean that which can justly be esteemed on its own account, independently of any utility, and of any reward or profit that may accrue."[89]

According to Reid, "Mr Humes sceptical System" resulted in confusion, because of "a wrong & mistaken Account of the intellectual Powers of Man."[90] David Owen has written that Hume contested the notion that humans are rational animals: "There is no independent faculty of reason designed by God for the pursuit of truth."[91] Hume, in this way, severed humanity's connection to *logos*, that is, universal or divine reason. Reid, on the other hand, sought to restore it. He did so by tying practical judgment to pneumatology, the study of the soul. Reid argued that "the Theory of Morals must be founded upon the knowledge of Pneumatology or rather makes a part of it. The duty of a Man must be grounded upon the human Constitution."[92]

A truly humane political society would permit conversation about truly human ends, the noble, the *honestum*, that which is excellent in itself. A utility-centric public life robs us of our distinctly human capacity to reason about the excellent, rather than simply what is useful for the achievement of our goals. But what goals do we pursue as individuals and in community with one another? Are they worthy goals? Reid commented, "To seek the foundation of morality in the affections which we have in common with the brutes," as Hume did by basing morals on emotional feeling, "is to seek the living among the dead, and to change the glory of man, and the image of God in his soul, into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass."[93]

The judgment of good and evil, Reid argued, is a human judgment, derived from that distinctly human faculty, the intellect. And it is a judgment not of the senses, of pleasure or pain, as Hume remarked, but of the understanding, of truth and falsehood.[94] This sort of moral judgment is not shared by brute animals. It is a kind of moral judgment that recognizes and strives to conform to humankind's nature and end. St. Augustine declared that "our ideal indeed is perfection, a perfection, however, which is proper to man."[95] In Reid's words, the judgment of moral facts, by the exercise of reason, in light of man's true nature, is "the prerogative of man." It permits human beings to distinguish between the base and the unworthy. It is a power "given us by God to regulate all our animal affections and passions."[96]

When we recognize that we have a thinking principle within us, we also recognize that there is a thinking principle underlying all of nature, which "may convince us of the Existence of a Supreme Mind the Maker and Governour of the Universe."[97] Reid argued that the intellect, rightly understood, helps us acquire "just Notions of ourselves and of the Supreme Being," which allow us to "more easily discover the Duty we owe to God

and to one another."[98] As a result, we can recognize that our duties do not only pertain to ourselves and to others, as Hume thought, but also to God.[99]

Reid presented his moral theory, rooted in the study of pneumatology, as a correction to Hume's, and presented "a true Account" of man's intellectual and active powers. If human beings possess an intellect that is oriented toward truth, then, by pointing out truths about what is good for the human person, the intellect helps reveal our duties, to God, to ourselves, and to others. If man is not only *homo politicus* but also homo *religiosus*, then the government must take cognizance of this fact. For in this case, human happiness depends on the bond between human reason and *logos*, that is, the divine, or universal, reason that is responsible for the order of nature. Reid argued that "a State neglects one of its most essential Interests if it neglects Religion and leaves that altogether out of its Consideration." Reid, in other words, recognized that religion—which consists of the relationship between the individual and the transcendent—is a basic human good, essential to human happiness, and thereby worthy of promotion by the state.

And the promotion of religion need not result in superstition, fanaticism, or persecution, as Hume feared. Reid believed natural theology, the second part of pneumatology, would not only correct the "low superstition" and "wild fanaticism" that plagued popular religion, but also provide a robust doctrine of toleration, by instilling in religious adherents the humility that might serve as an antidote to the spirit of persecution that Hume thought was inseparable from religious devotion.[100]

As Rawls stated, and as my previous chapters have made clear, Hume hated religion. In his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Rawls elaborated on this point: "Hume does without the God of religion altogether, and he does this without lament or a sense of loss. It is characteristic of Hume that he has no need for religion; moreover, he thinks religious belief does more harm than good, that it is a corrupting influence on philosophy and a bad influence on one's moral character."[101] But, if a Hume critic such as Reid is right that there is some natural order that human beings can recognize, that guides them in their pursuit of good and avoidance of evil, then there must be a source of that order, a higher intellect, lawmaker, and judge. A natural law that is intelligible to rational creatures, guiding their practical reasoning, directing them toward the good and away from the evil, attests to an intelligible natural order. In this way, the *honestum* and the *logos*, divine or universal reason, are linked.

The existence of the *honestum*—something excellent in itself—hints at the existence of an objective, overarching order that human beings can grasp, mentally, and communicate through speech. This is what public reason on the classical model looks like. And it is what contemporary public reason could and should look like: language referring to an accessible, shareable, universal, objective order that points human beings toward true, rather than apparent goods, based on a consideration of human nature.

Not everyone, however, is a philosopher who speaks or thinks in terms of the natural law, the *honestum*, and the *logos*, or who is able to master one's appetites. As R. R. Reno instructively writes, "For most people, religion and not philosophy is the primary way by which their metaphysical imaginations are enlarged."[102] Religion, that is, supplies believers with the imaginative and linguistic tools that approximate the classical language of the natural law, the *honestum*, and the *logos*.

Andre Willis has described Hume's moral theory—particularly insofar as it expresses a fire-breathing antagonism toward popular Christianity—as a prefiguration of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity.[103] Nietzsche mockingly described Christianity as Platonism for the masses. Interestingly, though, this view, in some ways, reflects that of St. Augustine. According to Augustine, the Platonic doctrines about the intelligible realm were too obscure to interest the masses in the pursuit of wisdom. God, having mercy on the many, drew people definitively and concretely to truth through the revelation of Christ, the *logos* made flesh.

The most impressive feats of Christian theology in the first millennia and a half of the Christian era—included in writings by thinkers from Justin Martyr to Thomas Aquinas—reflected this reconciliation of faith and reason, of Christian revelation with Greek philosophy, of Jerusalem and Athens. Hume, who was intent on devising a non-Platonic doctrine of morals and politics, had to take Christianity down with it. He perceived that the politics of *utile* could only be planted within an anti-Socratic and anti-Christian soil, a soil that would in no way nurture the flowering of the *honestum*.

In so doing, Hume captured the spirit of the age, the spirit of the freethinkers, and their revolt from theology. This revolt, according to Sir Leslie Stephen, "blinded men to the deeper meanings veiled in theological teaching; and led to a contemptuous estimate of the great moving forces which had uttered themselves in theological language as mere fanaticism,

'enthusiasm' and superstition." And this "tendency," Stephen concluded, "is also logically connected with Hume's philosophical position."[104] Hume, that is, denied that Christian theology contained teachings corresponding to philosophical truth and possessing moral and political worth.

## RELIGION AS A PATH TO *HONESTUM*

One of Hume's most blatant attacks on the Christian religion occurred in the second *Enquiry*. In one section in which he blasted the Christian virtues, he declared:

> And as every quality which is useful or agreeable to ourselves or others is, in common life, allowed to be a part of personal merit; so no other will ever be received, where men judge of things by their natural, unprejudiced reason, without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion. Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices; nor has any superstition force sufficient among men of the world, to pervert entirely these natural sentiments. A gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place in the calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself. (EPM 9.3)

Hume's critics contended that, by denigrating these "monkish" virtues, by trying to stamp out any superstitious posture of self-denial from polite society, he threatened to remove from public life a significant help to virtue. Balfour responded to Hume's barbs by praising monks as "the largest source of virtue."[105] Hume praised the virtue of strength of mind, which

lifts the calm passions over the violent passions, but his antireligious zeal blinded him to the way in which self-denial does something similar for the masses. Self-denial, in other words, is the religious equivalent of the philosopher's strength of mind, only more accessible to the public. The faithful Christian, for example, by submitting to the dictates of an almighty, all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfect Judge, learns to stand "opposite to all the selfish passions at once. . . . to moderate their violence, to check their indulgence, and, by a steady discipline, to reduce them to a proper subjection."[106]

In the second *Enquiry*, Hume regularly used exemplars, classical and modern, to depict the splendor of virtue. To highlight the value of self-denial, Balfour referred to an ancient exemplar who was universally admired among the classical philosophers. Scaevola, a Roman, was threatened with torture by an Etruscan monarch. In response, Scaevola put his hand in a fire and said, "See how much I regard your threat of torture." Balfour argued that Scaevola's action modeled the virtue of strength of mind as much as it did the virtue of self-denial. Yet Hume ridiculed the latter. According to Balfour, if we were truly to reduce virtue to pleasure and utility, as Hume did, we should suppose that "Scevola would have been happier, if instead of putting his hand into the fire, he had put it into his mistress's bosom."[107]

John Leland also took umbrage at Hume's derision of the monkish virtues. Leland was not surprised by Hume's stance, however, since elsewhere in the second *Enquiry*, Hume supposed that once the "dismal dress falls off, with which many divines, and some philosophers have covered her," virtue appears, in all her engaging charms, with "gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability, nay even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety. She talks not of useless austerities and rigours, sufferance and self-denial" (EPM 9.15). Leland charged that a "scheme of morals which includeth *play*, *frolic*, and *gaiety*, and has nothing to do with *self-denial*, *mortification*, and *sufferance*, will no doubt be very agreeable to many in this gay and frolicsome age."

Leland, though, portrayed self-denial as "a necessary ingredient in a truly excellent virtuous character," an ideal that restrains the appetites and passions, "keeping them within proper bounds, and in a due subjection to the higher powers of reason and conscience." To govern the passions and make them answerable to reason is "a noble attainment," testifying to "greatness of soul." Even though it may be "difficult or disagreeable" to

tame our animal natures, it produces happiness, tranquility, and satisfaction of mind, precisely those ends that Hume's moral and political theory sought to promote. If Leland is right, though, then religion is indispensable to social and political health, since it promotes the sacrifice of "private interest and advantage for valuable and excellent ends, for the honour of God, or the public good."[108]

In America, Jonathan Edwards's grandson Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), shortly after his appointment as president of Yale College (1795–1817), penned a work designed to rescue Yale's students from Hume's irreligious ideas. Dwight, who clearly thought Yale's students were familiar with Hume's writings, provided a litany of indefensible, and dangerous, positions held by Hume, including claims that "self-denial, self mortification, and humility, are not virtues . . . That Suicide, or self-murder is lawful and commendable (and of course virtuous:) That Adultery must be practiced, if we would obtain the advantages of life: That Female Infidelity (or Adultery) when known, is a small thing; when unknown, nothing." Hume's libertine attitude toward adultery indicated that "in time" such acts would "cease to be scandalous; and, that, if practiced secretly and frequently, it would by degrees come to be thought no crime at all."[109]

Such positions, for Dwight, derived straight from Hume's infidelity. And James McCosh, president of Princeton University from 1868 to 1888, similarly suggested that Hume's permissive attitude toward suicide and adultery stemmed from his denial of "a God bestowing the gift of life." Hume, who was not "swayed by a higher principle," could not see the "ultimate utility" of "stern virtues." These "stern virtues," which require significant sacrifice, are "often so immediately disagreeable" that Hume regarded them as vices. According to McCosh, self-sacrifice, humility, repentance "were not valued by Hume, who speaks of them as superstition and bigotry, and characterizes those who practice them as zealots and fanatics."[110]

The Humean worldview, like the liberal one, in general, is one in which life lacks a higher principle, in which there is no final end for man, in which man lives without hope in the final victory of justice and righteousness, in which man, alone on this isolated blue planet, occupies a fatherless world.[111] Hume's atheistic moral and political system rests on a vision of life without self-denial, without humility, without repentance, and, as at least one account of Hume's deathbed attitude reveals, without hope. Although the

narrative of Hume's death often reflects the sentiments of Smith's *Letter to Strahan*, according to which Hume lived out his final days with an air of drollery and nonchalance, there is an alternate narrative that receives less attention. This narrative captures the effects of the Humean worldview on the human psyche.

## THE END OF THE EPICUREAN MINDSET

Stories circulated after Hume's allegedly placid death—which was used as a stock example of the possibility that an atheist might experience a tranquil death—that he, contrary to lore, suffered from piercing, unremitting anxiety on his deathbed. Hume's housekeeper, most likely Margaret Irvine, was the source of this alternate account, which can be found in Alexander Haldane's *Memoirs of Robert Haldane* (1852). Robert Haldane's neighbor was Mr. Abercromby of Tullibody, the father-in-law of Hume's close friend, James Edmonstone. According to Haldane, Mr. Abercromby was in a stagecoach with two friends in the autumn of 1776. While Mr. Abercromby was sharing what he had heard from Colonel Edmonstone about the jollity and wit Hume displayed before death, a woman dressed in black entered the coach. Overhearing their conversation, the woman said, "Gentlemen, . . . I attended Mr. Hume on his death-bed, but I can assure you I hope never again to attend the death-bed of a philosopher." She shared that "Mr. Hume was cheerful even to frivolity, but that when alone he was often overwhelmed with unutterable gloom, and had, in his hours of depression, declared that he had been in search of light all his life, but was now in greater darkness than ever."[112]

In another account of this story, shared in an anonymous letter printed in *The Christian Observer* in 1831, Hume's housekeeper alleged that Hume, prior to his demise, feared being alone for a single minute. His agitation caused him to convulse and shake the bed violently. He left candles lit throughout the night. She reported that "he struggled hard to appear composed even before me; but to one who attended his bed-side for so many days and nights, and witnessed his disturbed sleeps and still more disturbed wakings; who frequently heard his involuntary breathings of remorse and frightful startings; it was no difficult matter to determine that all was not right within. This continued and increased until he

became insensible. I hope in God I shall never witness a similar scene." Having relayed this account, the anonymous letter writer concluded, "I leave your readers to weigh the probability of this narrative: for myself, I see nothing unlikely in it; for a man who had exerted all his talents to deprive mankind of their dearest hopes, and only consolation in the day of trial and the hour of death, might well be expected to suffer remorse in his dying hour."[113]

Benjamin Silliman (1779–1864), professor of chemistry and natural history at Yale, in his book *A Journal of Travels in England, Holland, and Scotland, in the Years 1805–1806* (1810), shared a story he heard from a close friend of John Witherspoon (1723–94), the Scottish clergymen, who was the sixth president of Princeton University. Silliman's source stated that Hume, an intimate friend, "did not die in all that composure, or rather that impious levity of mind, which has been ascribed to him, by the ardent but indiscreet zeal of his friend Adam Smith."

Referring to the story told by Hume's housekeeper, Silliman's source indicated that Hume died "in horror." He suggested, moreover, that this horror may have derived from Hume's treatment of his mother, a pious Presbyterian who educated him in the tenets of that religion. Hume allegedly "applied himself with unwearied, and, unhappily, with successful efforts, to sap the foundations of his mother's faith." One day, when returning from his travels abroad, Hume received an urgent message from London indicating that his mother was near death. In her letter, Hume's mother informed her son that "she found herself without any support in her distress; that he had taken away that source of comfort, upon which, in all cases of affliction, she used to rely, and that she now found her mind sinking into despair." She begged her son to provide her with "some substitute for her religion," perhaps in a letter "containing such consolations as philosophy can afford to a dying mortal." Hume did not make it to Scotland in time to see his mother before she expired. And Silliman's source surmised that Hume's deathbed anguish derived from the fact that he left his mother without consolation, without hope, without a replacement for religion in her final moments.[114]

George Horne, who, in *A Letter to Adam Smith*, had baldly criticized Smith's *Letter to Strahan*, commented that Hume, during his life, advanced "arguments downright Epicurean, against the being of a God."[115] And Hume lived by this belief. But, as Cudworth explained in his critique of

Hobbes, "The Atheistick Design in shaking off the Belief of a God" leaves individuals without "the least *Hope*, *Faith* or *Confidence*."

Long ago, Epicurus had designed his philosophical system for the purpose of freeing individuals from the fear of death and the fear of the gods. His system, though, as Cudworth pointed out, is doomed to fail, since it results in still greater fearfulness. Cudworth argued, in a manner that seems entirely consistent with Margaret Irvine's account of Hume's death as one ridden with gloom, fear, and darkness, that Epicureans, whether in ancient or modern guise, while "running from *Fear* . . . plunge themselves into *Fear*."

The antiatheist literature in seventeenth-century Great Britain, which advanced arguments against Epicurean and Hobbesian atheism, was inspired by the belief that unsound metaphysical and theological doctrine has real, baleful effects on human happiness, individually and collectively. John Smith, for example, one of the founders of the Cambridge Platonists, indicated that, if the classical Christian framework reflects more accurately the condition in which man finds himself, then man will never be satisfied, or at rest, living the Epicurean lifestyle. And if politics are oriented toward human happiness, then recognition of the moral and spiritual aspects of human flourishing is a public concern. For John Smith and the rest of the Cambridge Platonists, public disputation against the errors of Epicurean atheism was worth the effort, because the exchange of truth for utility worsens man's anxiety and deepens his sense of unhappiness. Smith remarked, in a passage that reflects the moral and political imagination of a bygone era:

> We find by experience that our souls cannot live upon that thin and spare diet which they are entertain'd with at their own home; neither can they be satiated with those jejune and insipid morsels which this outward world furnisheth their table with. I cannot think the most voluptuous Epicurean could ever satisfie the cravings of his soul with corporeal pleasure, though he might endeavour to perswade himself there was no better. . . . The more we endeavour to extract an autarchy out of our own souls, the more we torment them, and force them to feel and sensate their own pinching poverty. . . . Nor may we think to tame this violent appetite or allay the heat of it, except we can look upward to some eternal and almighty goodness which is alone able to

> master it. . . . It doth not, it cannot, rest it self any where but upon the centre of some almighty good, some solid and substantial happiness; like the hungry childe that will not be still'd by all the mother's musick, or change its sower and angry looks for her smiling countenance; nothing will satisfie it but the full breasts. The whole work of this world is nothing but a perpetuall contention for true happiness, and men are scatter'd up and down the world, moving to and fro therein to seek it. . . . God is not a meer empty name or title, but that self-sufficient good which brings along that rest and peace with it which they so much seek after.[116]

This language likely strikes us as fanciful and discredited, deserving no place in public political discourse. Such speech certainly would not qualify as public reason today. Theology and philosophy, faith and reason, are allegedly divided by a deep chasm, just as Epicureans ancient and modern supposed.

The language of *utile*, rather than *honestum*, prevails in our public political life. This language has enraptured the public mind, so that we hardly remember that there is an alternative. And when we do remember, the alternative likely strikes us as benighted, superstitious, or fanatical, just as Hume suggested. But our inability to recall the alternative does not mean that it is false. Neither does our distaste for it make it false.

The narrative of Hume's death is instructive here. According to one mythical construction, Hume's noble, philosophical death proved that religion is not necessary for a good life or a good death. This is the accepted myth, the authorized public account. Still, its public acceptance does not make it true. According to the alternative mythical construction, largely forgotten, ignored, or dismissed, Hume's ignoble, fearful demise proved that there is no substitute for religion, which is indispensable to a noble life and a noble death. This is the rejected myth. It is not the authorized public account. Still, its absence from the public imagination does not make it false. This latter narrative may well be recovered. And it may well be true.

The Italian priest Appiano Buonafede (1716–93) observed that Hume's philosophical vision rather than that of his many critics carried the day even in Rome, where Hume had many readers despite the fact that his works were on the Index of Forbidden Books.[117] Hume, Buonafede

wrote, "through his thousand artifices, and the eloquent, picturesque, almost magical spell he cast over people . . . managed to have his work read, and his opponents managed to get themselves forgotten."[118] Perhaps the time has come to recall those opponents, to resuscitate their rich and ennobling vision of human excellence, and to reinstate the rule of *honestum*. Such a move would require the reinvigoration of the imagination through the recovery of the classical Christian vision of moral and political life supplied by many of Hume's critics.

# Conclusion

One does not become the leading man of letters in Europe at the peak of the Enlightenment through shallow thinking and inelegant writing. Hume's genius and his wit are incontestable. His skeptical Epicureanism has helped shape the modern political imagination.

Still, his philosophy includes one insight that, if attended to, may help us reconsider how we think and talk about morals and politics. Political liberalism instrumentalizes reason. In this sense it is consistent with the modern trend of reducing politics to social scientific analysis, to empirical investigation. It follows from the same empirical turn that inspired Hume's attempt, in his *Essays*, to reduce politics to science. His empirical turn, though, was preceded by faith, what Rawls called a "fideism of nature."[1] Although Hume ridiculed faith in Christian revelation, he argued that even our most basic philosophical beliefs cannot be rationally justified. For this reason, Hume's empirical study of the mind, of politics, and of morals necessitated a prior leap of faith, a trust in natural beliefs we cannot help having: beliefs in the existence of the external world, in the uniformity of nature, in the unity of the self, for example.

In the 1750s, Johann Georg Hamann, a leading Christian thinker in Germany, presented Hume's philosophy as a resource for critics of the

Enlightenment, to the extent that Hume presented faith as a precondition of empiricism. This is perhaps one reason that the reception of Hume in Germany was less critical in the 1750s than it was in the 1770s, when Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and *Enquiries* became more widely available. The dispersion of these works, together with the works of Hume's critics, most notably Reid and Beattie, contributed to a shift in public perception on Hume in Germany, from a potential resource for Christian philosophers interested in challenging Enlightenment thought to an irreligious libertine worthy of contestation.[2]

Hume is justly remembered for his irreligion, but his philosophy, it is true, requires faith, not only in these natural beliefs, but also, more generally, in the intelligibility of nature. And this belief in the intelligibility of nature is consistent with belief in the existence of a transcendent source of order and regularity. If our minds, as Hume assumed, are ordered toward causal thinking—and indeed, it seems impossible to think in terms other than cause and effect—then it is reasonable to believe in some first principle of causal order in the universe. In other words, faith in the intelligibility, order, uniformity, and causal structure of nature, which Hume seemed to hold, is consistent with theistic belief.[3]

It seems to require only a slight jump from faith in the intelligible, causal structure of the universe to faith in the idea that human nature is structured in such a way that the perfection of the species rests on the attainment of specifiable goods, which all individuals are hardwired, by the Supreme Orderer, to pursue. In this case, our moral and political judgments concern moral facts, not moral feelings. When dealing with moral facts, our moral and political deliberations would draw upon principles, drawn by the intellect from the intelligible order of nature. Belief in the intelligibility and normativity of nature, then, opens the door to moral rationalism, of the kind defended by Reid.[4] It opens the door to the possibility that, as essentially rational, rather than passionate, beings, we differ in kind, rather than degree, from the animals, and pursue goods that possess intrinsic moral worth, that are not only valued for their pleasure or utility but also for their contribution to our perfection.[5]

This approach to public political deliberation is consistent with the classical Christian tradition, but such an approach would be no more faith-based than the "public reason" approach of political liberalism. After all, public political deliberation on the political liberalism model is already

faith-based. Political liberalism relies on the social contract tradition. And social contract doctrine rests implicitly on faith in the broader Epicurean world picture in which it originated. If public political discourse under the doctrine of political liberalism already depends on an implicit, unstated faith in a broader conception of the world—of life and the good—then it is not far-fetched to believe that we can reorient the political imagination, respiritualize the world, and return to the rule of *honestum*.

# NOTES

## Introduction

1. Quoted in Baggini, *The Great Guide*, 236.

2. Gibbon, *The Memoirs of the Life of Edward Gibbon*, x.

3. Brown, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty*, 102–3.

4. Harris, "The Epicurean in Hume," argues, for this reason, that there is little to be gained from relating Hume to one of the ancient schools of philosophy.

5. De Pierris, who persuasively presents Hume as a Newtonian thinker, argues that "Hume's normative commitment [is] to the Newtonian inductive method." De Pierris compares Hume's experimental method to that which is outlined by Newton in *Opticks*, Query 31. See De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 281n341, 15–16.

6. Stewart writes, "The mission of education in Hume's day was to train students for virtuous living in a society regulated by religious observance" (Stewart, "Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711–1752," 12). See also Sher, "Professors of Virtue."

7. For more details on this controversy, along with these quotes, see Harris, *Hume*, 208–16.

8. See, for example, Balfour, *A Delineation of the Nature and Obligation of Morality*, 158–59; Hutcheson, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, 3–4; and Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*, 3–4.

9. See his defense of *Phaedrus* 245c–246a, in Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 101–2 (6.26–29), and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 61–63 (1.52–53).

10. Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 80–81 (2.93–94).

11. Cicero, *On Laws*, 121 (1.44).

12. The Academy, Plato's school, promoted the teachings of Plato and his pupils until the time of Arcesilaus (315–241 BC). Arcesilaus founded the "New," or "Second," or "Middle" Academy, which was devoted to Socratic method rather than Platonic doctrine. Philo of Larissa (159–84 BC) argued that the New Academic

skeptics, Arcesilaus and Carneades (214–129 BC), did not suspend judgment regarding the veracity of appearances, but assented to that which is probable, which served as a standard for thought and action. Cicero presented the main principles of Academic philosophy in *Academica*. Hume's Academic skepticism is oriented toward assent to probable truth rather than suspension of judgment. NB: In this book, all italics for emphasis in quotations are original unless otherwise stated.

13. Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, 38 (2.65).

14. Hutcheson described Pyrrho of Elis (365–275 BC), "the father of the Skeptics," who accompanied Alexander the Great on his journey eastward, as "an assailant of all philosophy, who taught that all things are equally unknown and uncertain" (see Hutcheson, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, 7). Sextus Empiricus described Pyrrhonian skepticism as "an ability by which, because of the equal force in the opposed objects and reasonings, we arrive first at suspension of assent and after that at tranquility" (see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism* 1.8). According to Popkin, the discovery of Sextus Empiricus's manuscripts in the mid-fifteenth century led to renewed interest in skepticism (see Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, xx). Whereas the Pyrrhonian skeptics aimed at tranquility, the Academic skeptics aimed at intellectual integrity.

15. Fosl refers to Hume's skepticism as "a hybrid and admixture of both Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism" (Fosl, *Hume's Scepticism*, 103, 109, 170).

16. In EHU 5.1, Hume describes the common-life limit as an Academic principle. In EHU 12, however, Hume seems to argue that the common-life limit derives from Pyrrhonian doubts. There is reason to believe that the common-life limit is not essential to Academic skepticism, according to Cicero. For more on this, and the specific features of Hume's skepticism in general, see Zubia, "Hume's Transformation of Academic Skepticism."

17. Hume disparaged "the fictions of antient philosophy, concerning *substances*, and *substantial forms*, and *accidents*, and *occult qualities*" (T 1.4.3.1, 1.3.14.7).

18. See Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 14–15 (1.11); Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, 36 (2.60); Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, 26–27 (2.1–4); and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 11 (1.8), 155 (2.9).

19. Epicurus founded his school, "The Garden," in Athens around 306 BC. For Epicurus's hatred of Socrates, see Kleve, "Scurra Atticus." Epicurus declared that there would be "no need of natural science" if "our suspicions about heavenly phenomena and about death did not trouble us at all" (see Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 11, in *Epicurus Reader*, 33).

20. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.31, in Epicurus, *Epicurus Reader*, 41.

21. For an interpretation of Hume as a skeptical Epicurean, see Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*. Hume's aversion to all theologizing distinguished him from other Newtonian thinkers. See De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 23.

22. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics*, 167.

23. Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*, 3.

24. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 250.

25. Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 174–75n9.

26. Hobbes used the idea of the social contract as a means by which to explain the origin—and necessity—of absolute sovereignty. This emphasis on sovereignty, like Hobbes's insistence on natural human equality, is completely absent from the ancients. Strauss argued that Hobbes created a modern fusion of Platonic and Epicurean modes of thought. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 170.

27. The social contract tradition stretches back to Glaucon's remarks in Plato's *Republic*, but full-fledged theorizing about the social contract began with the Epicureans. See, for example, Thrasher, "Reconciling Justice and Pleasure in Epicurean Contractarianism." Critics accused Hobbes and Hume of repackaging the Epicurean narrative of the origin of justice and society. Tenison, for example, charged Hobbes with teaching "the same original of just and unjust" as Epicurus (see Tenison, *Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined*, 136). And Pufendorf acknowledged that "the old theory of the Epicureans appealed to [Hobbes] very much"; see Pufendorf, *Eris Scandica, qua adversus libros de jure naturali et gentium objecta diluuntur*, quoted in Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment*, 69–70. See also Tuck, "The Modern Theory of Natural Law," 107. Pufendorf described his opposition to Hobbes in Stoic terms (see Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 161). But Hutcheson categorized Pufendorf, too, as an Epicurean (see Hutcheson, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, 202). Hont interpreted Pufendorf as a Hobbesian because he believed human sociability derived from utility and advantage. And this is the central Epicurean insight, as noted by Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 10, 42. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 337, meanwhile, declared that Hume's political theory "savours of the very dregs of that sect [of Epicurus]."

28. Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 31–38, in *Epicurus Reader*, 35–36.

29. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.

30. Bruns, *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*, 73.

31. Larmore, "Political Liberalism," 65.

32. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 9.

33. Larmore acknowledges that although classical liberalism and political liberalism are similarly motivated, they are not identical in doctrine. Still, both Larmore and Rawls consider Hobbes to be a progenitor of liberal theory; see Larmore, "Political Liberalism," 65–68, and Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 11. Nussbaum, "Perfectionist Liberalism and Political Liberalism," 42, makes note of the similarity between political liberalism and Lockean liberalism.

34. Political liberalism, according to Wall, entails that "a politically autonomous society must be organized around a shared, or shareable, conception of justice and nothing more" (Wall, "Liberalism, Neutrality, and Democracy," 163–86).

And as Larmore argues, any and all political coercion within a society based on a shared conception of justice must not presume the "intrinsic superiority of any particular conception of the good life" (Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, 44).

35. Political liberalism is based on the fact of reasonable pluralism. And it grounds the principle of neutrality either in the principle of equal respect, as Nussbaum does, or the burdens of judgment, which is the idea, expressed by Rawls, that truths about the superiority of one conception of the good over another are not available to us because of the limits of human understanding. For a helpful overview of the role of neutrality in political liberalism, see Kelly, *Liberalism*, 3, 40.

36. The duty of civility, according to Rawls, requires citizens to avoid reference to controversial religious and philosophic views to defend public coercion in the public political sphere. Thus, political liberalism promotes the political virtues of civility and tolerance rather than "the virtues that characterize ways of life belonging to comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines" (Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 193–94).

37. Political liberals, of course, adamantly maintain that this is not the case.

38. Strauss argued that a conventionalist approach to politics is part of a package deal, insofar as it is connected to materialist physics, hedonistic ethics, and, I would add, an empirical methodology. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 109–13.

39. For the intellectual history of the concept of utility from Epicurus to Mill, see Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*. And even though Rawls consistently classified Hume as a "utilitarian," from his groundbreaking article "Justice as Fairness" (1958), to his lectures on the history of moral philosophy, which were published in 2000, he referred to T 3.2.2.22 to defend a more contractarian reading of Hume's theory of justice and society. See, for example, Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 168–69n6.

40. For the reading of Hume as a liberal social reformer, see Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, and McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory*. For the reading of Hume as the first conservative, see Livingston, "On Hume's Conservatism," and Muller, *Conservatism*.

41. In the thought-world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the respective political theories of Hobbes and Hume were not expressly *liberal*. Bentham and Mill were the first self-avowed liberals. Nevertheless, they interpreted Hobbes and Hume as predecessors; see the helpful essays in Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism*. Liberal political science is a methodologically individualistic science that assumes, as is largely the case in a commercial society, that each person is trying to better his condition, principally by means of riches. Liberal political science, having arisen amid the religious wars, also takes a plurality of interests and beliefs for granted, and attempts to maintain peace by promoting toleration, protecting liberty, and reducing religious conflict. Rawls and Waldron correctly

maintained decades ago that legitimacy and liberty are the two overarching concerns of the liberal approach to politics. And Hume shared these concerns. See Waldron, "Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism," and Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy,* 1–22.

42. Anonymous, "Review of *Treatise*, Book III, *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*" (April–June 1741), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:2–3.

43. Hume continued to write and amend his essays throughout his career. In 1748, he released a new volume, *Three Essays, Moral and Political*, which was the first of his books to bear his name. In 1752, Hume's *Political Discourses*, a volume of twelve new essays, was released and rapturously received. Hume's collected works, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, appeared in several editions from the 1750s onward. The 1758 edition contained four new essays. And the 1777 edition contained the final new essay, which appeared posthumously. The standard edition of Hume's essays (*Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*), published by Liberty Fund, contains a total of forty-nine essays, eight of which were originals from 1741 and 1742 that Hume eventually dropped and two of which were never published during Hume's lifetime.

44. The reworked version of book 1 of the *Treatise* was published in 1748 as *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The revised version of book 2 of the *Treatise*, entitled, *A Dissertation on the Passions*, was published in *Four Dissertations* (1757). The reworked version of book 3 of the *Treatise* was published as *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751).

45. Stewart, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 17.

46. Hume likely called the *Treatise* a "juvenile" work in the "Advertisement" for volume 2 of *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1777) because his critics, Reid and Beattie, had attacked the *Treatise* rather than the more refined *Enquiries*. It is reasonable to assume that Hume wanted to direct attention to his more mature writings. See Harris, *Hume*, 443, and Hume, L 2:301.

47. See Hume, L 2:233.

48. See ibid., 1:193.

49. Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 19.

50. Quoted in Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 225–27.

51. Harris observes that Hume's and Montesquieu's writings express a similar "cosmopolitan worldliness" (Harris, *Hume*, 289).

52. See Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 229, and Harris, *Hume*, 289.

53. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 223.

54. Quoted in Spencer, *Hume's Reception in Early America*, 87.

55. Harris, "The Epicurean in Hume," 163.

56. Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, 246.

57. Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*. Lucretius, a first-century Roman poet, authored *De rerum natura*, a lengthy poem designed to teach Epicurean doctrine.

## ONE. Hume's Critique of Religion

1. In the *Dialogues*, the character Cleanthes treats the terms "atheist" and "skeptic" as near synonyms, stating that "it is now, in a manner, avowed, by all pretenders to reasoning and philosophy, that atheist and sceptic are almost synonymous" (DNR 1.17, 41). In his last conversation with Boswell, Hume ridiculed religious systems of morals, while claiming that one of the most honorable men he knew, Lord Marischal, was "a downright atheist." See Boswell, "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq." (1776), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:290.

2. Brown, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty*, 102–3.

3. Gay, *The Enlightenment*, 1:307.

4. Ibid., 1:6.

5. In order to elucidate the meaning of this statement, it might be useful to turn to the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. There, Philo and Cleanthes ultimately agree that one cannot live out extreme skepticism. One must reason, act, and believe. One cannot perpetually suspend judgment, as the extreme skeptic would recommend. If this is true, then anyone who claims to adhere to extreme skepticism is dissimulating. Similarly, Hume takes for granted the existence of a first cause, as did other reputed deists and atheists of the time, such as Voltaire and Diderot. Because of this belief in universal order and the regularity of nature—evident in both the physical and moral sciences—Hume supposed that anyone who professed atheism could not truly live it out. See DNR 1.17, 41.

6. For this report, documented by Diderot, see Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 483.

7. Ibid., 485.

8. For the suggestion that Baxter wrote *A Specimen*, see Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 21–23. For more on the context surrounding Hume's candidacy for the Edinburgh chair, see Harris, *Hume*, 206–16.

9. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 595–96, suggests that Hume died of "chronic ulcerative colitis."

10. Boswell, "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq.," in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:289. When Boswell relayed this to Johnson, Johnson responded, "Sir, if he really thinks so, his perceptions are disturbed; he is mad: if he does not think so, he lies"; see Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 10:160–61.

11. Boswell, "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq.," in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:288. For a discussion of Hume's turn away from the Calvinism of his youth, see Harris, *Hume*, 48–51.

12. For more detail on this conversation, see the discussions in Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 597–98, and Phillipson, *David Hume*, 13–14.

13. The official version of Smith's *Letter to Strahan*, which accompanied Hume's autobiographical account, "My Own Life," as a preface to Hume's printed works, contained different wording. The wording was amended, perhaps, for the sake of prudence. In the published version, Hume expressed his desire to remain on earth to "have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition." For the two versions, see Smith, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 204, and Hume, L 2:451.

14. "'My Own Life' and Reviews," in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:266.

15. Ramsay, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, 1:462.

16. See Mure, *Selections from the Family Papers Preserved at Caldwell*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 10:195–96.

17. Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 290.

18. Rasmussen, *Infidel and the Professor*, 222. Smith commented that his rejection of the necessity of religion for a life of virtue generated more critical responses than his attack on the entire commercial system of Great Britain in *The Wealth of Nations*; see Smith, *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 251.

19. Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 10:163.

20. Ramsay, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, 1:466–7.

21. Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 32.

22. See Greenblatt, *The Swerve*.

23. Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, 39–41 (2.89–183).

24. Ibid., 185–87 (5.1161–1237).

25. For more on the ancient Epicurean doctrine of the gods, see Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:145–49.

26. Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 90.

27. See Pocock, "Clergy and Commerce."

28. Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 102. And see, for example, Blackmore, *Creation*.

29. See Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, vii.

30. Bentley, *Works of Richard Bentley*, 3:4, 44.

31. Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*, 52. As Mayo notes, the Anglican establishment supported the Royal Society, the Cambridge Platonists, and the Cartesians in their efforts to rebut the doctrines of the "Epicureans" and "Hobbists"; see Mayo, *Epicurus in England*, 142–43.

32. See Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 4.

33. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 240–41 (31.14–28).

34. Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 21. See also Hickson, "Disagreement and Academic Scepticism in Bayle," 309–10.

35. Clarke, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, 1.

36. Ibid., 46.

37. Bentley, *Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism*, 5–6. For a similar formulation, see Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 79.

38. Hunter and Wootton, *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, 2; Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 3.

39. Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity*, 1–19.

40. Ibid., 4.

41. Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 12–13, 38.

42. Malcolm, "Hobbes, Ezra, and the Bible," 383.

43. Ibid., 386–98; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 256 (33.19).

44. Ahnert, *Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805*, 30–32.

45. Locke had suggested that God might "superadd" the power of thought to matter. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 540–41 (4.3.6). This set off a lively debate about the possibility of thinking matter. This debate is described in detail in Yolton, *Thinking Matter*. It is important to note, though, that for Locke, a prior thinking principle, that is, God, remains necessary to explain how matter might be given the power of thought; see Locke, *Essay*, 623–24 (4.10.10). And Locke maintained that it is more probable that thought inheres in an immaterial, rather than a material, substance; see Locke, *Essay*, 345 (2.27.25). See also the correspondence between Collins and Clarke in the years 1707–8, "A Letter to Mr. Dodwell" and responses, in Clarke, *Works of Samuel Clarke*, 3:719–913.

46. See Harris, *Hume*, 66–69. Harris observes, "It is hard . . . to imagine Hume being much impressed by [Baxter's] case against materialism." And "Hume surely sympathized with Dudgeon," insofar as he recognized that the attempt by the Chirnside Presbyters to silence Dudgeon would threaten his own freedom of thought and expression.

47. Ibid., 68.

48. See Bonar, *Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:36.

49. Russell, "Skepticism and Natural Religion in Hume's Treatise," 260–65.

50. Hume wrote that Hobbes "partakes nothing of the spirit of scepticism; but is as positive and dogmatical as if human reason, and reason in particular, could attain a thorough conviction in these subjects" (HIST 6:153). Nevertheless, Samuel Johnson persisted in calling Hume a "Hobbist." See Russell, "A Hobbist Tory," 75.

51. Anonymous, "Review of *Treatise*, Books 1 and 2 in *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*" (April–June 1740), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 3:63.

52. "Review of *Treatise*, Book III, *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*" (April–June 1741), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:10. Wishart, *A Specimen*, leveled the same charge. See Hume, LG 14–17.

53. Cudworth was one of the Cambridge Platonists, a set of influential clergymen who looked to Plato for aid in confuting modern Epicurean atheists. The

Cambridge Platonists also drew upon Aristotelianism and Stoicism. Antiatheist writers often cited classical philosophers, including Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch, and Church Fathers, including Augustine and Lactantius, as they described how natural reason might reveal the essential attributes of God. See Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 93–95, 137n1.

54. See the account in Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 634.

55. Ibid., 172, emphasized by Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 101.

56. Hume may have consulted Cudworth's ideas indirectly through Jean LeClerc's detailed reviews of *The True Intellectual System*, published in the *Bibliothèque Choisie* in six volumes between 1703 and 1706; see Pittion, "Hume's Reading of Bayle," 380–81, and Stewart, "The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts," 267–314. Miller offers an updated account of the dating of Hume's early memoranda and endorses the theory that they were written in the late 1730s, while Hume was in France writing the *Treatise*; see Miller, "Hume's Citation of Strabo and the Dating of the Memoranda," 197–202.

57. Penelhum argued that, because Hume sought to expose "the intellectual baselessness of faith," he ought to be regarded as "an anti-religious writer and secularizer"; see Penelhum, "Hume's Views on Religion," and Penelhum, *God and Skepticism*. Yenor, *David Hume's Humanity*, contends that the skeptical Hume is dogmatic in his irreligion. Norton, "Hume, Atheism, and the Autonomy of Morals," also described Hume as an atheist. For a classic argument in favor of the view that Hume is "an attenuated deist," see Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 168. For an argument that Hume is a philosophical theist, see Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 69. This view of Hume as a philosophical theist, a believer in some first cause responsible for universal order, but ultimately unknowable, is adeptly forwarded by Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*. For the claim that Hume remains agnostic on the subject of religion, see Noxon, "Hume's Agnosticism"; Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief"; and Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 274–75.

58. Referred to by Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:386.

59. Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, 494.

60. Ibid., 487n.

61. See Bonar's charges in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:38, 36.

62. Quoted in Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 325.

63. Horne, *A Letter to Adam Smith*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:391.

64. For the *London Review* quote from April 1777, see Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:387. Hume clearly equated superstition with popular Christianity in his writings. Don Garrett describes Hume's overarching goal as the liberation of philosophy from superstition, in Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*,

7. In later writing, Garrett has described Hume as an "infidel," but he acknowledges that there is such a thing as "true religion" in Hume's philosophy; see Garrett, *Hume*, 284, and Garrett, "What's True about Hume's 'True Religion'?," 199–220.

65. Quoted in Fieser, "Hume's Concealed Attack on Religion and His Early Critics," 436.

66. Throughout Christian history, there have been theologians who have rejected the merits of natural theology and relied solely on special revelation in defense of their faith. These Christian theologians include the Church Father Tertullian, seventeenth-century fideists, such as Blaise Pascal, and twentieth-century neo-orthodox thinkers, such as Karl Barth. These thinkers were as critical of natural theology as Hume. But these philosophical skeptics, by relying on revealed religion alone as the basis of their faith, are properly called "fideists" rather than "atheists."

67. For Hume's amendments of the *Treatise*, which were made to avoid offending a religious audience, see Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 112–13. For a thorough presentation of the *Treatise*'s irreligious elements, in spite of these amendments, see Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*.

68. Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*; Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated*.

69. Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*; Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*; Paley, *Natural Theology, or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*.

70. Philo is likely named after one of the leaders of the skeptical New Academy in the first century BC. Since the publication of the *Dialogues*, reviewers have regarded Philo as Hume's "favorite," or the "hero of the piece," who exhibits the same kind of skepticism Hume defended in his other writings; see Fieser, "Hume's Concealed Attack on Religion and His Early Critics," 439–40. This has remained the standard interpretation. Smith, for example, says, "Philo, from start to finish, represents Hume"; see Norman Kemp Smith, introduction to *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 59. Gaskin seconds this position in Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion*, xxiii. Yandell, however, has questioned this consensus, arguing "that no one participant always speaks for Hume"; see Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief," 110.

71. This thesis is forwarded persuasively by Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*, 107, 116–17, and Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 238–39.

72. Neoplatonists and also St. Thomas Aquinas utilized the *via negativa* expressed here, a way of coming to know God by expressions of what he is not rather than what he is.

73. Hume wrote in the second *Enquiry*, "The idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom" (EHU 2.6).

74. According to Hutcheson, Pyrrho of Elis (365–275 BC), "the father of the Skeptics," was "an assailant of all philosophy, who taught that all things are equally unknown and uncertain"; see Hutcheson, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, 7.

75. Knowledge requires certainty. Hume implied here in T 1.4.1 that, because "demonstration is subject to the control of probability," demonstration does not provide us with certainty. According to Fosl, *Hume's Scepticism*, 272–73, this section of the *Treatise* destroys the epistemic legitimacy of reason. There are two potential responses to Fosl's argument that Hume is a radical skeptic who thinks neither demonstrative nor probable reason possesses epistemic warrant. First is Baier's thesis that the idea of "reason" that Hume critiqued in T 1.4.1 was not his own conception of reason, but that of the philosophical rationalist, that is, someone like Clarke (see Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 10, 60–61). Second is De Pierris's argument, which is similar to Ainslie's, that the critique of reason in T 1.4.1 is true on the metalevel, that is, the philosophical level, but not in the realm of common life and science, in which we must trust, act, reason, and believe (see De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 19–21, 144–145, and Ainslie, *Hume's True Scepticism*). Hume did not include the contents of T 1.4.1 in the first *Enquiry*. There, Hume focused solely on skepticism regarding the senses.

76. On this point, Popkin, "Bayle and Hume," is essential reading.

77. Ainslie writes, "This is Hume's empiricism: All thoughts must ultimately have their origins in prior sensations or emotions" (Ainslie, *Hume's True Scepticism*, 6). And Hume's empiricism is grounded in this faith in the senses, which he calls "the clearest and most convincing of all evidences" (LG 22).

78. Ainslie's argument is that the philosophical attempt to justify our beliefs interferes with the rationally unjustifiable beliefs that ground decision and action in common life. Since philosophical interference causes unease, philosophical reflection is optional. In other words, Ainslie defends the idea that "the unexamined life can be well worth living" (Ainslie, *Hume's True Scepticism*, 219, 229).

79. Hume does not repeat his argument from T 1.4.1, "Of scepticism with regard to reason," in which he claimed that demonstration resolves into probability.

80. These natural beliefs are nonrational, universal, and inevitable, serving as necessary preconditions for action. In the *Treatise*, these include belief in body, causation, and personal identity. This entails a return to "the situation of the vulgar" (T 1.4.3.9), subsequently improved by proper method. Norman Kemp Smith's influential outline of natural beliefs in Hume did not include a natural belief in religion (see Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume"). Butler argued that religion qualifies as a natural belief in Hume (see Butler, "Natural Belief and the Enigma of Hume"), but Gaskin and McCormick rightly observe that religion does not qualify as a natural belief for Hume, since it is neither indispensable nor universal.

According to Hume, it is conceivable to live—and live well—without belief in God; see Gaskin, "God, Hume and Natural Belief," and McCormick, "Hume on Natural Belief and Original Principles."

81. "We assent to our faculties," Hume argues, "and employ our reason only because we cannot help it" (T Abs.27).

82. In EHU 4.20, Hume referred to "experience" as the "great guide of human life." Hume tends to use "experience," "custom," and "habit" as synonyms.

83. Nature sometimes seems to trump, defeat, or overcome skepticism in Hume's writing. De Pierris refers to the view that skepticism is a preliminary stage on the way toward the establishment of an empirical science of human nature as the "vehicle" view (see De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 1, 296n354, 303). The following works contain persuasive arguments on behalf of the "vehicle view": Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*; Stroud, *Hume*; Garrett, "'A Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism."

84. For the best presentations of Hume as a Newtonian thinker, see Stroud, *Hume*, and De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*. For a critique of this view, see Capaldi, "Hume as Social Scientist."

85. De Pierris adeptly argues for the normative role of this method in Hume's philosophy; see De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 15–16, 278, 281n341.

86. Paganini, "'Libertas Philosophandi' and Liberty of Hypothesizing," 328.

87. Although Hume claimed that the ancient Academics sought to "limit our enquiries to common life" (EHU 5.1), the Academic philosophers of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds did not seem to have abided by it. For a more in-depth treatment of the relationship of Hume's Academic skepticism with the ancient version, see Zubia, "Hume's Transformation of Academic Skepticism." Fosl, *Hume's Scepticism*, is correct to assert that Hume incorporated elements of both Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism into his thought.

88. See De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 23.

89. Paganini, "'Libertas Philosophandi' and Liberty of Hypothesizing," 323–23, points this out.

90. The New Hume debate centers on whether Hume denied the existence of causal power in nature or only its knowability. See Read and Richman, *New Hume Debate*.

91. Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 231.

92. A syllogism is a form of deductive reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn from two premises. The textbook example, which hardly bears repeating, is this: All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal.

93. Hume critiques a priori argumentation for God's existence in EHU section 4, part 1, and EHU section 12, part 3, in particular. For a detailed account of Hume's treatment of the a priori argument for God's existence, which Hume

drew directly from Clarke, see Stewart, "Hume and the Metaphysical Argument A Priori." Of course, it was common for Epicureans to reckon all "Reasons *à priori* for nothing"; see Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:788 (Remark S).

94. More, *Antidote against Atheisme*, Epistle Dedicatory.

95. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia q. 2, art. 3.

96. More, *Antidote against Atheisme*, 7.

97. Ibid., 14–16.

98. See also Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 635.

99. By claiming that we have no innate idea of God, Hume also indirectly discounted the ontological argument for God's existence, most famously presented by St. Anselm. According to this argument, God is that being than which no greater can be conceived. But, Cleanthes remarks, "the mind can at least imagine [God] to be non-existent, or his attributes to be altered" (DNR 9.7, 92). Cleanthes can say this, because he, like Hume, denied that existence is a property, which it must be for the ontological argument to work; see T 1.2.6.4; 1.3.7.2. Kant would argue against the ontological argument in a similar manner; see Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 233.

100. Quoted in Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 233n166.

101. Of course, Hume left the faculty of the intellect out of his metaphysics of mind entirely and elevated the faculty of imagination in a way that is consonant with the "way of ideas" articulated by Locke; see the helpful chapter on Hume and the "empire of imagination" in Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 27–57. Philo, like Hume, denies that there is a rational faculty (DNR 4.12, 65). The character Demea seems to share this view, which would put him at odds with other Neoplatonic thinkers. He also seems to subscribe to Hume's theory of the association of ideas and to reject divine simplicity (DNR 4.2–3, 61). In another strange turn, Demea subscribes to Hume's view that religious belief derives not from reason, but from terror, ignorance of causes, and hope for an afterlife (DNR 10.1, 95; NHR 3.2, 141–42). Hume's Demea holds intellectual positions that are not internally consistent.

102. Hume makes the same point, through the voice of Epicurus, in EHU 11.30.

103. In this dialogue, Hume's friend gives a speech, imagining that he is Epicurus speaking to an Athenian mob in defense of his philosophy, which severs morals from religion.

104. See Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 255.

105. One revision Philo proposes is that the atoms are finite, not infinite.

106. Paganini, "'Libertas Philosophandi' and Liberty of Hypothesizing," 337, 339.

107. Stewart argues that Hume had already laid out the argument from evil by the time the *Treatise* was published. It may have been intended for the *Treatise*, like the piece on miracles, or even planned for a second edition of the *Treatise* that never came to fruition. But Hume had formulated the argument early in his writing career and waited for the right time to publish it. See Stewart, "An Early Fragment on Evil," and Stewart, "Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711–1752," 46–47.

108. Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, 41 (2.180–81).

109. Holden contends that Hume's argument from evil is a parody of traditional natural theology and that Hume did not consider the argument to be valid, because it violates the skeptical restriction against "distant and high" inquiry. Nevertheless, the simplest reading is best. Hume seemed to present the argument from evil as a valid and convincing argument, based as it is on human experience. See Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity*, 145–79.

110. See Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 56–57.

111. Willis describes Hume's basic theism as the acknowledgment that there is an adjustment of means to ends in nature and that, because the mind is hardwired to think causally, there must be a transcendent source of order and regularity; see Willis, *Toward a True Humean Religion*, 52–55, 67. Although Willis calls genuine theism a "natural belief" (31–34), it seems unlikely that Hume would regard this theologizing move, which stretches beyond the present material world to a transcendent realm, as natural or necessary, when, as Philo says, humans naturally are attached to "present things" and have "little concern" for objects "remote and uncertain" (DNR 12.13, 122). Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 64–67, argues that philosophical theism grounds the principle of induction. But custom, or habit, alone is enough to validate inductive reasoning, as is made clear in EHU section 5, which begins with Hume's renunciation of "all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice."

112. Based on this remark, it seems that Philo's nonreligious hypotheses in parts 6 and 7, in which he compares the principle of order in the universe to a world soul or a principle of generation consistent with vegetable life, still operate on analogy. But the revised Epicurean hypothesis, which is based on the *certainty* that matter is in continual agitation, does not rest on an inconceivable analogy, which seems from Philo's perspective to add to its plausibility.

113. The following writers present Philo's turn as insincere: Norman Kemp Smith, "Introduction"; Penelhum, *God and Skepticism*, 139; Priest, "Hume's Final Argument," 349–52; Vink, "Philo's Final Conclusion in Hume's 'Dialogues.'" Other scholars, however, argue that Philo expresses genuine belief in an intelligent designer without the moral attributes of the Christian God; see Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief," 118; Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 173; Coleman, "Interpreting Hume's 'Dialogues.'"

114. Ogilvie, *Inquiry into the Cause of the Infidelity and Scepticism of the Times*, 68–69.

115. Priestley, *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, 1:108.

116. Harris, *Hume*, 444.

117. Dees, "Morality above Metaphysics," 132.

118. Cf. ibid., 137.

119. Ibid., 134.

120. See the excellent analysis in Hanvelt, *Politics of Eloquence*, 60–61.

121. The Port-Royal miracle story exemplified the kind of "superstition" that Hume sought to rob of credibility. According to this story, which Hume mentioned in his text, Marguerite Perrier, the niece of Pascal, had a tumor in her left eye. When the Port-Royal monastery gained possession of a relic, purportedly a piece of Christ's crown of thorns, in 1656, Perrier placed it on her left eye, at which point, the tumor was healed and a frenzy ensued.

122. Hume harshly criticized belief in the real presence in NHR 12.2–7, 167–69, claiming that the belief "is so absurd, that it eludes the force of all argument."

123. See Tillotson, *A Discourse against Transubstantiation*. For the context in which Hume's argument against miracles takes place, see Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles*.

124. For an excellent analysis of "Hume's Newtonian notion of proof," see De Pierris, *Ideas, Evidence, and Method*, 16.

125. Arnauld, who authored the influential textbook *The Art of Thinking* (1685), had argued that quality testimony should generate commitment even if the events reported are difficult to comprehend. Locke also argued that testimony is a reliable ground of belief; see Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 694 (4.18.8). For more on Hume's perspective, see Wootton, "Hume's 'Of Miracles.'" For book-length treatments of Hume's arguments against miracles (critical and favorable), see Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, and Fogelin, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles*.

126. See, for example, Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, Or A Rational Account of the Grounds Of Christian Faith* (1662).

127. Gaskin suggests that Hume is responding to Sherlock, who in *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1729), argued that the apostles provide reliable testimony regarding Jesus's life, death, and resurrection; see Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 105–12.

128. Willis argues that Hume's aim is not to disprove the miraculous, but to defend a method of belief formation. It just so happens that this method falsifies the main doctrinal commitment of Christian faith, namely, the resurrection of Jesus Christ; see Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*. For similar arguments,

see Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 120, and Buckle, *Hume's Enlightenment Tract*, 259.

129. Brahami is right to assert that "the *Dialogues* are logically before the *Natural History*"; see Brahami, "Criticism and Science in Hume," 373n22.

130. Danford uses these passages as evidence of Hume's philosophical theism, in Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason,* 164–86.

131. These are the original passions that Hume delineated in T 2.3.9.8.

132. Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:790 (Remark S).

133. See Gaskin's note in Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion*, 212.

134. Slightly earlier, in NHR 15.1, 183, Hume championed the design argument, stating that "a purpose, an intention, a design is evident in every thing" and leads "us to conceive this intelligence as single and undivided," expressing "one single purpose or intention." Whether this statement is consistent with Hume's arguments against natural theology in the *Dialogues* is up to the reader to decide.

135. Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*, 100.

## TWO. The Epicurean Critique of Religion and the New Political Science

1. Among the moderns, Hume's critique is similar to that which can be found in Spinoza, *Ethics,* part 1, appendix, in *Complete Works*; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 72 (12.6); and Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2:213.

2. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 45. Strauss, though, did not elaborate on the way in which Hobbes's successors, specifically Bayle, Mandeville, and Hume, built on this critique. Hume scholars, moreover, tend to downplay his Epicureanism, minimizing the extent to which he extended the Hobbesian project, particularly its critique of religion. See Harris, "The Epicurean in Hume," and Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*. Cf. Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*.

3. See, for example, Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, 185–86 (5.1161–1202).

4. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 38.

5. Hobbes also held certain ideas associated with Socinianism, which denied the divinity of Christ and propounded unorthodox views about the Trinity. See Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 66, 69–72.

6. For example, Epicurus supposed that physics was only useful insofar as it furthered human happiness. Epicurus promoted happiness by means of a scientific method that illuminated the workings of nature without reference to deities who act vindictively and arbitrarily behind the scenes. See Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 11, 12, 18, in *Epicurus Reader*, 33–36.

7. Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, 30 (1.932–33).

8. Ibid., 5 (1.78–84).

9. See Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, ix–x.

10. For further explication of this point and on Strauss's thoughts on the possibility of a return to premodern political philosophy, see Burns, "Leo Strauss on the Origins of Hobbes's Natural Science," 826.

11. Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 65.

12. See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 35–36, and Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 151–52.

13. Strauss, "Notes on Lucretius," viii, 96; Nichols, *Epicurean Political Philosophy*, 179–81.

14. This mentality has its beginnings in Spinoza, but it becomes most evident in Hobbes. See Wurgaft, "From Heresy to Nature," 277.

15. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 198, 200. See, too, the helpful analysis by Stauffer, "Strauss's Discussion of Hobbes in *What Is Political Philosophy?*," 88. Spinoza also thought popular enlightenment would have beneficial social effects; see Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 37–43.

16. See Springborg, "Hobbes and Epicurean Religion," 206.

17. Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 26.

18. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 23. For the role of the theologico-political problem in Strauss's work, see Batnitzky, "Leo Strauss and the 'Theologico-Political Predicament.'"

19. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 183–88.

20. Ibid., 189–90.

21. For more on the nature of political conventionalism and its Epicurean origins, see Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 109–13.

22. On the use of Epicureanism and atheism as synonymous terms, see Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 102.

23. Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*, 28. The thesis that antiatheist writers in the seventeenth century, who articulated atheist doctrine in order to refute it, helped spread atheist ideas is a prominent theme in Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, and Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*.

24. Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*, 7.

25. Cicero's works, including *De natura deorum*, *De finibus malorum et bonorum*, and *Academica*, explicated the doctrines of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy.

26. Epicurus, "To Menoeceus," in *Epicurus, the Extant Remains*, 87–88 (128–29); Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:663 (10.137); Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*; Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 21; O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, 111–15.

27. Epicurus, "To Pythocles," in *Epicurus, the Extant Remains*, 59 (86); Gill, "Psychology," 126.

28. Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, 66–8 (2.1023–65); Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 156–57.

29. For the history of Epicureanism's reception, see Jones, *Epicurean Tradition*; Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*; and Erler, "Epicureanism in the Roman Empire."

30. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 101.

31. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics*, 13.

32. Bayle, "Aristotle," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 1:469–72.

33. Ibid., 1:464.

34. All forms of Epicureanism are noted for their opposition to Aristotelianism. See Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*, 28.

35. Kroll, "The Question of Locke's Relation to Gassendi," 349. See also LoLordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*.

36. For this argument, see Norton, "The Myth of 'British Empiricism,'" 331; Lennon, *Battle of the Gods and Giants*; Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 91–92.

37. Bayle, *La Cabale Chimérique* (1691), quoted in Lennon, "What Kind of a Skeptic Was Bayle?," 264.

38. Quoted in Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651*, 288.

39. Hobbes, *English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 6:340–41. Hobbes was no servile follower of ancient philosophy. Although he and Gassendi shared a preference for Epicurean ideas in contrast to Scholastic alternatives, Hobbes, who also expressed devotion to a Galilean science of motion, insisted that his own views were "very different" than Gassendi's. For more on Hobbes's use of Galilean ideas, see Paganini, "Hobbes's Galilean Project."

40. See Osler, "Fortune, Fate, and Divination."

41. Quoted in Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*, 58.

42. The English philosophers Robert Boyle and Joseph Glanvill (1636–80) similarly combined Epicurean atomism with Christian providence. But Gassendi went further, defending not only Epicurus's speculative principles but also his practical morals. Gassendi, like Walter Charleton (1619–1701), rehabilitated the figure of Epicurus, depicting as virtuous he who previously had been dismissed as a libertine; see, for example, Charleton, *Epicurus's Morals* (1655), which was the first book on Epicurus published in England. Others who sought to promote Epicureanism as a way of life, not necessarily from within the wider Christian tradition, include Sir William Temple (1628–99), representative of the moderate cultural hedonism of England's Restoration period, and Charles de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703), who represented the more libertine brand of atheism in France; see Temple, "Upon the Gardens of Epicurus," and Saint-Évremond, "On the Morals of Epicurus." Bayle, "Epicurus," in *The Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:783, mentions these defenders of Epicurus's morals.

43. See Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*, 55, and LoLordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*, 227–52.

44. Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, 40.

45. Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*, 33–35.

46. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 169, 188–89, for a discussion of the political aspects of Epicurean philosophy. It is not surprising that Epicureans earned a reputation for being apolitical. Gassendi argued that, because the supreme good in life is tranquility, "a wise man must not involve himself in publick affairs, unless upon some intervening necessity" (see Stanley, *History of Philosophy*, 916).

47. See Nichols, *Epicurean Political Philosophy*, 13–15; Colman, *Lucretius as Theorist of Political Life*.

48. Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 31, in *Epicurus, the Extant Remains*, 103–5.

49. Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 102–5.

50. It is unclear whether Hume studied law at university under a tutor or independently, but he likely would have been exposed to Mackie's curriculum, which featured both Stanley's *History* and Bayle's *Dictionary*; see Emerson, *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 111–12.

51. Gassendi, *Three Discourses of Happiness, Virtue, and Liberty*, 311–19.

52. Stanley, *History of Philosophy*, 932.

53. Gassendi, *Three Discourses of Happiness, Virtue, and Liberty*, 225–29.

54. Stanley, *History of Philosophy*, 929.

55. See Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 2.1144–45, in Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, 237.

56. Gassendi, *Three Discourses of Happiness, Virtue, and Liberty*, 44–45.

57. Charleton, *Epicurus's Morals*, 161.

58. A distinction is worth nothing here. Whereas in the ancient Epicurean tradition, the formation of pacts upon entry into society mirrors the combination of atoms in the natural world (see Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, book 2), modern appropriators of the Epicurean tradition placed less emphasis on the naturalness of social compacts than on the use of social compacts as a means by which to overcome the wretchedness of the natural condition. This reflects the ancient emphasis on the imitation of nature and the modern emphasis on the mastery of nature.

59. Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses, in Fifteen Books*, 2:7.

60. Quoted in Gassendi, *Three Discourses of Happiness, Virtue, and Liberty*, 323.

61. See, for example, the writings of Plato, Cicero, and Seneca, in Lovejoy, *Primitivism*, 162, 244, 272.

62. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia IIae q. 103, arts. 1–4.

63. Gassendi, *Three Discourses of Happiness, Virtue, and Liberty*, 323. Cf. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 6.10.3.

64. Explaining what he meant by natural sociability, Cicero wrote: "There is nothing so noble or wide-ranging as society between human beings, that alliance, so to speak, of shared interests and this mutual affection of the human species"; see Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, 139 (5.65).

65. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 6.10.3.

66. Ibid. See also Clement of Alexandria's comment, from the *Stromates*, that "Epicurus . . . more than anyone prefers pleasure to truth," in *Epicurus Reader*, 87.

67. Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 52–54.

68. Ibid., 68–72.

69. See Vitoria, *On the Indians*, in *De Indis et De Jure Belli Relectiones*, 127 (1.23). For a similar list, see Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, 42–43.

70. Vitoria, *On the Indians*, 361 (3.18) and 127 (1.23).

71. Ibid., 122 (1.6).

72. Bayle, "Hobbes," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 3:467.

73. The top half of the frontispiece, which is labeled *religio*, depicts the last judgment; for a fuller analysis of the various frontispieces to *De cive*, see Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*, 285–92.

74. For Hobbes's claim that *De cive* is the first work of political science, see Hobbes, *De corpore*, "Epistle Dedicatory," in *English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 1:7. For Hobbes's assertion that the goal of political science is to discover the causes of war and of peace, see Hobbes, *De corpore*, in *Elements of Law*, 190, 206. Strauss rightly argued that Hobbes's philosophy is one "of civilization: it wants to contribute to the securing and advancement of civilization through knowledge of the conditions of civilization" (Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 110–11).

75. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 39.

76. Hobbes, *De corpore*, in *Elements of Law*, 226.

77. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 5–6 (11.1–2).

78. The family is a commonwealth—a little monarchy—by acquisition rather than a commonwealth by institution. Normatively, commonwealth by institution is the measure of legitimate political authority; see Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 72–74 (5.7–12), and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 136 (20.15) and 156 (22.26).

79. Hobbes, *De corpore*, in *Elements of Law*, 190.

80. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 79–80.

81. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85–86 (13.13).

82. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 200.

83. Ibid., 104.

84. Ibid., 95.

85. Ibid., 106.

86. Ibid., 80.

87. For an illuminating study, see Ashcraft, "Hobbes's Natural Man," 1076–1117.

88. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 28–29 (1.10).

89. Hoekstra, "Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Mankind," 114. For this reason, Hobbes's state of nature is not simply a hypothetical model that forms part of an abstract thought experiment. Cf. Tricaud, "Hobbes's Conception of the State of Nature from 1640 to 1651," 110–11.

90. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 80. See also Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 30 (1.13).

91. For an overview of Hobbes's historical account of the progress of society, see Kraynak, "Hobbes on Barbarism and Civilization," 90–92. Kraynak argues that "the primary theme of Hobbes's studies in civil history is the distinction between barbarism and civilization" (90).

92. See Sagar, "Of Mushrooms and Method." Hume held the same position (E-OC 471).

93. For a detailed argument in favor of the view that Hobbes supplemented his deductive science of politics with the study of civil history, see Baumgold, "When Hobbes Needed History."

94. Interestingly, some writers, including Montaigne, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Richard Hakluyt, were inclined to highlight the good nature and innocence of the Amerindians, who in some cases seemed to live an Edenic existence. See Ashcraft, "Hobbes's Natural Man," 1093–95.

95. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 82 (13.2).

96. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 30 (1.13).

97. Tenison, *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined*, 133–34.

98. Klosko and Rice, "Thucydides and Hobbes's State of Nature," 405–9.

99. See Paganini, "Early Modern Epicureanism."

100. Clarendon, "Of Liberty" (1670), in *Miscellaneous Works of the Right Honourable Edward, Earl of Clarendon*, 143.

101. Quoted in Mayo, *Epicurus in England*, 59–60.

102. Warburton, *Miscellaneous Translations in Prose and Verse*, 124.

103. A thinker like Hobbes did not praise Epicurus's moral character, but endorsed Epicurean ideas insofar as he considered them useful for the development of the moral and physical sciences. Even a pure theoretician, such as Hobbes, who did not invoke Epicurus as an authoritative figurehead, was regularly labeled an Epicurean by intellectual rivals. This was regular seventeenth-century practice. Jon Parkin, for example, asserts that Hobbes "was identified as a neo-Epicurean almost as soon as the *Leviathan* was published, and not without reason" (Parkin, *Science, Religion, and Politics in Restoration England*, 92). For a detailed method by which to determine the extent to which a modern thinker might have an affinity to Epicureanism, see Leddy and Lifschitz, "Introduction," in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*. See also Mayo, *Epicurus in England*, 118, and Meis, "Science as a Cure for Fear," 35.

104. Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 894–95. See also Watkins, *Hobbes's System of Ideas*, 118. Gassendi, too, had argued that there is no *meum* and *teum* outside society, for "justice, hath no being at all, but in mutual society" (see Charleton, *Epicurus's Morals*, 172).

105. Tenison, *Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined*, 136.

106. Ibid., 132–33.

107. Ibid., 128.

108. Hutcheson, *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, 134.

109. Filmer, *"Patriarcha" and Other Writings*, 188.

110. Bramhall, "Castigations of Mr. Hobbes," in Rogers, *Leviathan*, 155.

111. For the various Aristotelian approaches to political thought presented in response to Hobbes, see Whitehall, *Leviathan Found Out*, 12, and Lowde, *Discourse Concerning the Nature of Man*, 150–53. Mark Goldie, "Reception of Hobbes," 594, writes that attacks on Hobbes were "the last gasp of scholastic Aristotelianism."

112. Sommerville, "Hobbes and Independency."

113. See Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 273–78. Hobbes's moral psychology also bears considerable resemblance to the neo-Augustinian moral psychology that would later appear in the writings of the French Jansenists; see Tricaud, "Hobbes's Conception of the State of Nature from 1640 to 1651," 121. For more recent scholarship on the Reformed nature of Hobbes's moral and political philosophy, see Dauber, *Reformed Ethics of Thomas Hobbes*, and Collins, *Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*.

114. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 237.

115. Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 62, portrayed *Leviathan* as "a myth, the transposition of an abstract argument into the world of imagination."

116. This conception of religion, in which religion is the primary threat to social order that requires a solution, preceded Hobbes's turn to the Galilean resolutive-compositive method. Hobbes's modern political mentality, then, is a "prescientific" one. Since the antireligious posture precedes the turn to modern science, modern science, in Hobbes's writing at least, is subservient to this antireligious attitude; see Stauffer, "Reopening the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns."

117. The very fact of the English civil wars revealed that people did not fear violent death above all. They feared eternal damnation above all. For Hobbes's political program to work, then, the people would need to be "enlightened," to see the world in material rather than spiritual terms; see Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 198–200; Stauffer, "Strauss's Discussion of Hobbes in *What Is Political Philosophy?*," 88.

118. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 218 (29.15).

119. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 169–70, noted that "[Hobbes's] natural philosophy is as atheistic as Epicurean physics." A monistic mechanistic-corporealistic physics, moreover, had beneficial political implications, since, as Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 45, argued, "denial of the dualism of substances entails the denial of the dualism of powers." The dualism of substances, that is, supported the division of society into two realms with two jurisdictions—the physical and the spiritual. As Spragens and Springborg maintain, Hobbes's universe, which is in perpetual motion, bears no mark of divinely ordained order; see Spragens,

*The Politics of Motion*, 101–2, and Springborg, "Hobbes and Epicurean Religion," 196. It is important to remember that Hobbes, unlike Gassendi, was not an atomist; see Gaskin, "Introduction," in Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, xxv.

120. As Martinich states, Hobbes impressed upon his audience that "the ultimate fate of human beings depends . . . upon obedience to the sovereign" (Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 257). Hobbes argued that the soul expires with the body at death, a theory called "mortalism," which had numerous adherents in early modern Europe. If true, this would free individuals from fear of eternal torment in the afterlife. Richard Baxter (1615–91), in *Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1667), considered "Mr Hobs" and "Gassendus" together as "Epicureans" who denied the immortality of the soul. For Hobbes's denial of the immortality of the soul, see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 73 (12.7), 410–11 (44.15). For more on Hobbes's mortalism, see Curley, "Calvin and Hobbes," 258–59. Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism," 647–63, argues that Hobbes subscribed to mortalism only in his later writings. Hobbes did argue that if God exists, then he would presumably have the power to resuscitate our mortal bodies. And he also interpreted hell literally, as real fire consuming real bodies. As a result, he asserted that if there is any torment after death, then it would be temporary and endurable, resulting in a second death that leads to "no more dying . . . no more going into hell . . . no more going to Hades"; see *Leviathan* 303–8 (38.8–15). It is not unheard of for a devout Christian to endorse mortalism, as Milton did. For a comparison between Hobbes and Milton on this point, see Henry, "Milton and Hobbes."

121. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 218 (29.15).

122. Ibid., 264–65 (34.14).

123. Ibid., 284 (36.11). As a result, he referred to all modern prophets and prognosticators, who experience dreams and visions of this sort, as "madmen"; see ibid., 248–49 (32.6–7), and Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 188.

124. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 424 (45.1).

125. Ibid., 291 (37.5).

126. Hobbes did not categorically deny that miracles can occur, but he did deny their relevance and import in light of the explanatory power of science.

127. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 64.

128. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 187 (16.1). See also Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 77, and Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, x, 91.

129. Hobbes, "An Answer to Bishop Bramhall's Book," in *English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 4:309–10.

130. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 447 (46.15), asserted that "because the universe is all, that which is no part of it, is *nothing*; and consequently *nowhere*."

131. Ibid., 240 (31.22). Hobbes described the word "infinite" as cognitively meaningless. Because we have no experience of infinitude, we have no idea of it;

ibid., 19 (3.12). We attribute infinitude to God to honor him. It would dishonor God to refer to him as finite.

132. The notion that "the same body may be innumerable places, at one and the same time . . . is against reason"; ibid., 224 (30.6).

133. Ibid., 240 (31.15).

134. For excellent explications of this topic, see Jesseph, "Hobbes's Atheism," and Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 77–79.

135. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 382 (42.120).

136. Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 26.

137. Ibid., 20–25, 91.

138. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 69 (11.17).

139. Hobbes, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 319–27.

140. Hobbes, *De corpore*, "Epistle Dedicatory," in *English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 1:11.

141. See also Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 17, in *Complete Works*, 514–19. For a similar division between faith and reason endorsed by the Protestant Reformers, see Eisenach, "Hobbes on Church, State and Religion," 223. Brandon, *Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, argues that Hobbes's political philosophy is a fusion of philosophical materialism and insights from the radical Reformation.

142. See Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 58, 95–96.

143. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 44 (7.7). According to Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 226, who presents a case for Hobbes's theism, "Hobbes's position does not entail that God has never spoken to any human being. It means only that humans cannot know when this occurs and that there is no compelling evidence for it."

144. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 68.

145. Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 45–48, 55. For Hobbes, the sovereign is the absolute author and enforcer of law, regardless of whether that authority consists of an assembly or an individual. Spinoza also asserted that the sovereign should possess all political and religious authority and should thereby establish religious doctrine. Spinoza also argued, on practical grounds, for freedom of thought and speech; see Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 19, in *Complete Works*, 557.

146. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 119 (18.9); Hobbes, *An Historical Narration concerning Heresy and the Punishment Thereof*, in *English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 4:391–93.

147. Lucy, *Observations, Censures, and Confutations of Notorious Errours in Mr. Hobbes His Leviathan*, 264–67.

148. Leland, *View of the Principal Deistical Writers*, 1:31–35.

149. Edwards, *Some Thoughts concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism*, 128–29. See also Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 61.

150. Bartlett quoting Ernst Cassirer in "Introduction," in *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, xxiii.

151. The *Dictionary* also included, as Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," notes, salacious tidbits designed to offend and perhaps push the boundaries of conventional morality, particularly concerning marriage and sexuality.

152. Quoted in Popkin, "Bayle and Hume," 154. Like Popkin, Sabl, "David Hume," interprets Bayle as a skeptic, an antirationalist philosopher. Bayle, though, grounded his political theory in a confident moral anthropology that he derived from experience and observation. Israel, "Pierre Bayle Correspondence," 486, captures this idea when he argues that Popkin's portrayal of Bayle as a skeptic and a fideist does not adequately describe the mature Bayle, one of the "foremost subversive philosophers of his age." The mature Bayle portrayed Christianity as inconsistent with the rational moral principles to which he was committed.

153. Bartlett, "Introduction," xxiii.

154. Wootton, "Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period," 723–24.

155. Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, 160 (section 130).

156. Religion actually made pagans more wicked. Religion led them to sacrifice infants to the gods, defile the temples of other gods, and consult the entrails of the deceased (ibid.).

157. Ibid., 162 (sec. 131).

158. Ibid., 167 (sec. 134).

159. Ibid., 171 (sec. 138).

160. Ibid., 168 (sec. 135).

161. Ibid., 169 (sec. 136).

162. Ibid., 178 (sec. 143). It is debatable whether Bayle thinks Christianity—or any religion—is separable from the spirit of persecution. Mori supposes that, for Bayle, all religions are intolerant, which is why politics must be freed from religious influence if citizens or subjects are to enjoy intellectual liberty. Hickson and Lennon, "The Real Significance of Bayle's Authorship of the *Avis*," 196, disagree with Mori, arguing that Bayle faults not religion itself for intolerance but theologians and political figures who misinterpret and misuse religion.

163. Ibid., 180 (sec. 145).

164. Ibid., 162 (sec. 122).

165. The first English translation of Bayle's *Various Thoughts* appeared in 1708.

166. Locke also thought Catholics should not be tolerated because their primary allegiance is to the pope, a foreign head of state, rather than the English monarch.

167. Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," in *Locke: Political Writings*, 426.

168. Locke, "An Essay Concerning Toleration," in ibid., 188.

169. Bentley, *Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism*, 35.

170. Ibid., 31–32.

171. Ellis, *Folly of Atheism*, 12.

172. Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, 165 (section 133).

173. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 39.

174. Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, 165 (sec. 133).

175. Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:776 (Remark D).

176. Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, 212 (sec. 172).

177. It is a "historical fact" that Bayle "was taken to be an atheist"; see Lennon, "What Kind of a Skeptic Was Bayle?," 268.

178. Hickson, "Theodicy and Toleration," 51, reads Bayle's writings on the problem of evil as contributions to his theory of toleration, written without anti-religious intent, but some of his most prominent readers, such as Mandeville and Hume, seemed to emphasize the atheistic implications of the problem of evil as captured in the *Dictionary* articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians."

179. Quoted in Hickson, "Disagreement and Academic Scepticism in Bayle," 14.

180. Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:780 (Remark G).

181. Remark E, quoted in Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 105.

182. Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:788–89 (Remark S). Bayle, who considered faith, not natural reason, to be the path toward salvation and illumination, lambasted the systems of all natural philosophers, while claiming that the holy scriptures alone have "the advantage of laying the solid foundation of the providence, and the perfections of God."

183. Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:783 (Remark N).

184. Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 218–19.

185. See Popkin, "Bayle and Hume," 154.

186. For readings of Bayle as a fideist, rather than an atheist, see Labrousse, *Bayle*, and Irwin, "Reading Bayle, Again," 146. Sandberg's (*At the Crossroads of Faith and Reason*) reading followed this interpretation, according to which Bayle engaged in a Calvinist criticism of reason, which, after the Fall and because of total depravity, is incapable of accessing the truth by its own efforts. Lennon, "Did Bayle Read Saint-Évremond?," 235–37, also takes Bayle's professions at face value. Mori, meanwhile, emphasizes the way in which Bayle provoked orthodox theologians by criticizing the rationality of faith. In this sense, Bayle's writings are not friendly to faith; see Mori, "Bayle, Saint-Évremond, and Fideism."

187. "The key to the text is in the text itself"; see Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, 32.

188. The citation of Saint-Évremond occurs in the second edition of *Dictionary Historical and Critical* (1702). It is quoted in Lennon, "Did Bayle Read Saint-Évremond?," 272. Lennon, however, contends that Bayle did not read Saint-Évremond.

189. Bayle claimed in the *Continuation of the Various Thoughts* (1704), shortly after Saint-Évremond's death, that Saint-Évremond was a virtuous atheist; see Mori, "Bayle, Saint-Évremond, and Fideism," 324.

190. Recent scholarship presents Bayle as a political thinker who (1) opposed the state's enforcement of religious orthodoxy, (2) opposed the doctrine of resistance, which would have permitted religious minorities to enforce their own versions of religious orthodoxy, and (3) wanted to see his ideas about toleration adopted by the state, whether sovereignty resided in a monarch, oligarchs, or the demos. I agree with Laursen, "Pierre Bayle's *Reply of a New Convert*," 864, that Bayle was "a legitimatist," who believed in "something close to the modern doctrine of liberal rule of law." For recent scholarship, see Jenkinson, "Rationality, Pluralism and Reciprocal Tolerance"; Israel, "Pierre Bayle's Political Thought"; García-Alonso, "Bayle's Political Doctrine."

191. Mandeville is described as Bayle's disciple in Popkin, "Bayle and Hume," 151, and Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," 207.

192. Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, 58.

193. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2:344–45.

194. Ibid., 2:345.

195. Among the classical philosophers in the Socratic schools, artifice is portrayed not as a vitiation of nature, but as a practice consonant with nature. For Aristotle, art and nature are not necessarily antithetical, because nature intends for human beings to complete what nature has begun, by exercising ingenuity and using natural resources. According to Plutarch, nature gave human beings reason precisely to enable them to overcome their weaknesses. And Cicero writes in *De finibus* 4.34 that "it is [wisdom's] task, keeping her eye on nature, to complete the statue which nature began." This classical Socratic perspective evinces a positive stance toward nature, while still acknowledging natural human weaknesses. See Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, 190, 247–48.

196. Mandeville, "A Search into the Nature of Society," 131. This essay was appended to the second edition of the *Fable*'s first volume (1723).

197. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:324.

198. Ibid., 1:323–24.

199. Hutcheson, "On the Natural Sociability of Mankind," in *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, 213.

200. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:324.

201. Ibid., 1:3–4, 150–51.

202. Ibid., 2:314.

203. Mandeville claimed he was describing the ineptitude of reason and depravity of man to show how desperately human beings stand in need of divine grace (ibid., 2:356). Goldsmith writes, however, that Mandeville was interpreted

as "a pernicious mocker of religion and virtue" due to his seeming relish for humanity's vanity and hypocrisy; see Goldsmith, "Regulating Anew the Moral and Political Sentiments of Mankind," 587–606.

204. Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, 8. Primer described *Free Thoughts* as "a popular digest of often sensational highlights from Bayle's *Dictionary*"; see Primer, "Introduction," in Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, xviii.

205. Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, 167.

206. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:281.

207. Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, 156.

208. Ibid., 130, 159.

209. Ibid., 4. Anticlerical writings abounded during this period, even among those who may not have shared a neo-Epicurean perspective. See, for example, Collins, *Priestcraft in Perfection*, and Gordon and Trenchard, *The Independent Whig*.

210. Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, 161.

211. Ibid., 160.

212. Ibid., 127.

213. Ibid., 119.

214. Ibid., 140.

215. Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720*, 303; see also 10, 247, 297.

216. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:42.

217. Mandeville emphasized that religion proved "incapable of exciting man to virtue" (ibid., 1:50).

218. Ibid., 1:269.

219. Ibid., 1:210.

220. On the attempt to distinguish between the satirical and philosophical elements in Mandeville's social thought, see Monro, *Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville*.

221. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, 61–64, argues, reasonably, I think, that Mandeville used the skillful politician of volume 1 as a "fictive literary device" and always assumed that society evolves slowly over time.

222. Ibid., 2:22–23.

223. Ibid., 1:101.

224. Ibid., 1:349; see also 2:212.

225. Ibid., 1:147–48. See Hundert, *Enlightenment's Fable*, 17–18. Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*, 35, writes that "the first principles of *The*

*Fable of the Bees* are Epicurean." Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 280, moreover, writes that Mandeville subscribes to "the Epicurean conviction of the power of the passions."

226. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2:259, 180, 349. According to Mandeville, "many generations may pass" before society is created. It is not "the work of one man, or of one generation," but "the product, the joynt labour of several ages." The formation of society is a "great difficulty" requiring "many favourable accidents" (ibid., 2:200, 322).

227. For parallels between Mandeville and Hobbes, see Kaye, "Introduction," cix–cx. Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume*, argues that Mandeville moved away from Hobbesianism in his later works. Volume 1 of the *Fable* contains a Hobbesian emphasis on fear, and volume 2 provides a more nuanced approach to the transition from savagery to civilization.

228. For the standard treatment of the republican, or civic humanist, tradition in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 401–505.

229. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2:196–99, 233–34; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 275–76.

230. For the same division in Hobbes, see *De corpore*, in *Elements of Law*, 192.

231. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:348.

232. Ibid., 2:199.

233. Ibid., 2:261. Turner, "Mandeville against Luxury," argues that Mandeville endorsed the experimental method because of his dissatisfaction with speculative medical practice.

234. See Skjönsberg, *Persistence of Party*, 90–91.

235. For an overview of the many economic changes that occurred in England during this time period, see Dickson, *Financial Revolution in England*. For the centrality of the Epicurean idiom to the science of political economy, see Whatmore, "Luxury, Commerce, and the Rise of Political Economy," 578.

236. For more on Mandeville's association with the Court Whigs, see Gunn, "Mandeville"; Hundert, *Enlightenment's Fable*; Primer, "Introduction."

237. Mandeville wrote in the tradition of French Jansenism. The Jansenists had utilized a penetrating neo-Augustinian moral psychology to highlight the hypocrisy of courtesans, who were constantly maneuvering for their own advantage. The Jansenists, including Blaise Pascal (1623–62) and Pierre Nicole (1625–95), followed Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) in emphasizing the fall of man, original sin, and the inability of man to know God by virtue of natural reason. They routinely criticized those Jesuits who believed they could cooperate with God in achieving salvation. Their moral psychology, which uncovers the pretensions of human beings by pointing out their self-centered motives, overlaps with

the Epicurean moral psychology insofar as it targets the pride of the Stoics. For an example of the moral psychology inspired by the Jansenists, see Mandeville's translation of the fables of La Fontaine: Mandeville, *Some Fables after the Easie and Familiar Method of Monsieur de La Fontaine*. For an example of the predominance of the passions in neo-Augustinian thought, see La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, no. 10. See also Van Kley, "Pierre Nicole, Jansenism and the Morality of Enlightened Self-Interest," 69–85. Ahnert, *Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805*, 6–9, writes briefly about the relation of Augustinianism, Jansenism, and the Scottish Enlightenment. Horne, *Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville*, 19–31, argues that Mandeville drew upon the Augustinian moral psychology of the French Jansenists. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, 50, argues that Mandeville employs a Hobbesian (and Augustinian) moral psychology.

238. See Hundert, "Presentment of the Grand Jury of the County of Middlesex," 214–15; Speck, "Bernard Mandeville and the Middlesex Grand Jury."

239. Mandeville responded that the grand jury was occupied by Tories and Jacobites, defenders of the Stuart, rather than Hanoverian, line of kings.

240. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:185.

241. Ibid., 1:356.

242. Ibid., 2:92, 222.

243. Ibid., 1:3, 39, 139–40; 2:21.

244. Ibid., 1:41.

245. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 50, 134.

246. Emerson, *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 136.

247. Having described polytheistic tribes in America, Africa, and Asia, Hume asked, since "north, the south, the east, the west, give their unanimous testimony to the same fact . . . [w]hat can be opposed to so full an evidence?" (NHR 1.2, 135).

248. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4.285–99.

249. Hume's story of humanity's progress from polytheism to monotheism is not linear. Hume suggested, instead, that monotheism and polytheism are in perpetual flux. After human beings begin to believe in a single almighty Deity, who is solely responsible for universal order, they frequently regress into a belief in "demi-gods or middle beings," which more easily become the objects of devotion because they appear more human. Hume uses as his primary example the Catholic treatment of saints; see Hume, NHR 8.2, 159.

250. This bears a close affinity to Epicurus's remarks in "Letter to Herodotus," in *Epicurus Reader*, 18 (81).

251. Hume referred to the Puritans as an example of fanatical sectarianism, since, during the reign of James I, they "maintained, that they themselves were the

only pure church; that their principles and practices ought to be established by law; and that no others ought to be tolerated" (HIST 5:129).

252. Russell and Willis are right to observe that religion and justice, in Hume's writings, are designed to serve similar goals; see Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 290; Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*, 131.

253. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 79.

254. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2:178.

## THREE. Hume, Epicureanism, and the Contractarian Vision

1. For the role of the Epicurean idiom in reducing politics to a science, see Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*; Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*. Moore and Norton first engaged in the debate over Hume's Epicureanism; see Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," and Norton, "Hume and Hutcheson." Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, has presented Hume as a skeptical Epicurean.

2. For insight into the fundamentals of Epicurean political thought, see Force, "Helvétius as an Epicurean Political Theorist," and Wilson, "Political Philosophy in a Lucretian Mode."

3. Harris, "David Hume's Political Theory," has claimed that Hume's "assault" on social contract theory is such "well-trodden ground" that it deserves no further study. Harris, "The Epicurean in Hume," is similarly dismissive of Epicureanism in Hume. Hume's rejection of contractarianism is emphasized in both Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 282, and Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 252–53.

4. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:383.

5. Ibid., 1:389.

6. In the essay "Of the Original Contract," written before the second *Enquiry*, Hume described the "doctrine, which founds all lawful government on an original contract, or consent of the people" as contrary to the common sentiments of humankind (E-OC 486). Still, convention, as Hume seemed to acknowledge in the second *Enquiry*, requires some kind of agreement, or consent, even if it is not exactly the same kind of agreement, or consent, implied by a contract.

7. Sagar has called Humean political realism a "new idiom" of thought, one that is "non-Hobbesian," or more specifically noncontractarian in nature. Sagar argues, moreover, that "the epicurean framework" obscures as much as it illuminates, so that "we are better off not using it to understand Hume's thought." Sagar contends that Hume is a noncontractarian thinker because he bases political

authority on the opinion of mankind rather than the creation of—and consent to—the exercise of sovereignty; see Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 12.

8. Epicureanism has been acknowledged as one of the earliest versions of social contract theory; see Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"; Thrasher, "Reconciling Justice and Pleasure in Epicurean Contractarianism."

9. This interpretation makes sense of literature that places Hume among the giants of social contract theory; see Gauthier, "David Hume, Contractarian"; Sugden, *Economics of Rights*; Vanderschraaf, "The Informal Game Theory"; Skyrms, *Evolution of the Social Contract*. Indeed, Hume scholars have begun to question the hasty conclusion that Hume's political theory is a renunciation of contractarian thought *tout court*; see Whelan, "Hume and Contractarianism," 201; Merrill, "Rhetoric of Rebellion."

10. Plutarch, "Against Colotes," 5:377.

11. Ibid., 5:377.

12. Aristotle, *Politics*, 5 (1253a30–39).

13. Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 31, in *Epicurus Reader*, 35.

14. Aristotle, *Politics*, 4 (1253a1–20).

15. Aristotle first specified the three classical categories of the good (the honorable, the useful, and the pleasurable) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cicero subsequently argued that the *honestum* is good in itself. *Honestum*, for Cicero, is the highest of these three categories. Whatever is *honestum* is useful; see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 30 (1104b29–35), and Cicero, *On Duties*, book 3. For an investigation of how these three categories of the good played a role in eighteenth-century political economy, see Force, "Skepticism and Political Economy."

16. Nichols, *Epicurean Political Philosophy*, 20, 120, 181; Wilson, "Political Philosophy in a Lucretian Mode," 280.

17. Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 80 (4.3a).

18. Ibid., 18 (1.39a).

19. Cicero, *On the Laws*, 111 (1.18).

20. Ibid., 120 (1.42).

21. Ibid., 121 (1.44).

22. Ibid., 112 (1.19).

23. Cicero asked, "What is there, not just in humans, but in heaven and earth, more divine than reason?"; ibid., 113 (1.22). See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 225 (1177b26–33).

24. Cicero, *On the Laws*, 121 (1.45).

25. Ibid., 114 (1.25).

26. Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 65.

27. Strauss found in Epicureanism not only the oldest form of political conventionalism, but also "the most developed form of classical hedonism" (Strauss,

*Natural Right and History*, 109–13). Brown, "Politics and Society," rightly introduces the Epicurean view of politics and society by contrasting it to the Socratic view.

28. Hutcheson, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, 127, 132. Hume made the same distinction, but without reference to providential teleology.

29. Ibid., 134–35.

30. Ibid., 177.

31. Ibid., 136–37. See also Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*, 53.

32. Hutcheson, *System of Moral Philosophy*, 52 (I.iii.vi).

33. Ibid., 206.

34. Hutcheson, *Reflections upon Laughter*, 45–46.

35. Mandeville, "A Search into the Nature of Society," 131.

36. Quoted in Rist, *Epicurus*, 123.

37. Clay, "The Athenian Garden," 18–20.

38. Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, in *Epicurus Reader*, 28 (DL 10:128–30). For the connection between Epicurean moral psychology and the broader Epicurean philosophical framework, see Gill, "Psychology," 126, 139.

39. Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines,* 33, 36, in *Epicurus Reader*, 34–35. For an interpretation of Epicurean justice as not just artificial but also natural, insofar as it is necessary for the attainment of *ataraxia*, which is our natural end, see Armstrong, "Epicurean Justice."

40. Mill, "Bentham," 86. See also Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*.

41. Laurie, *Notes Expository and Critical* (1868), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:367.

42. Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, in *Epicurus Reader*, 31 (DL 10:132); 44 (DL 10:138).

43. Bentham, *Deontology*, 188.

44. See Hume, EPM 5.15.

45. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 302, 312.

46. Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 91–92; LoLordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*, 60; Lennon, "The Epicurean New Way of Ideas," 260.

47. This is compatible with Susato's claim that Epicureanism is "vital" to Hume's philosophy; Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 16–17.

48. Hobbes, *Correspondence*, 1:122–23.

49. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 15 (2.10).

50. Bayle, "Rorarius," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 4:901–2, 907 (Remark C).

51. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:45, 1:181, 2:139–40, 2:166; Hundert, *Enlightenment's Fable*, 37–39.

52. Kaye, "Introduction," in *Fable of the Bees*, cxxx.

53. La Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, 13.

54. Norman Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 11.

55. See also T 2.2.12.

56. For more on Hume and materialism, see Buckle, "Hume's Sceptical Materialism"; Wilson, "Hume and Vital Materialism."

57. Garrett has suggested that, for Hume, there appear to be certain background structures, subject to universal physical laws, that determine the operations of our perceptions. These structures are located "presumably, if not necessarily . . . in the brain" (Garrett, *Hume*, 84).

58. See Biro, "Hume's New Science of the Mind," 63. Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*, 25–45, presents a different interpretation, arguing that Hume is neither a physicalist nor a reductivist of any sort, but rather a non-Cartesian dualist.

59. Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 200.

60. Buckle, *Hume's Enlightenment Tract*, 176.

61. Hume, in a letter to Allan Ramsay regarding Anderson's attempt to excommunicate Hume, called Anderson "the godly, spiteful, pious, splenetic, charitable, unrelenting, meek, persecuting, Christian, inhumane, peace-making, furious Anderson," who was "very hot in pursuit of Lord Kames" (quoted in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:63).

62. Anderson, *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion Personally and Publicly Stated* (1753), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:76–77.

63. See Hume, L 1:12–14; Harris, *Hume*, 26, 81.

64. After his bout of exhaustion, Hume likely read Bayle's *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, which contains a favorable overview of Epicurean philosophy. See Greig's note in Hume, L 1:12. Harris, *Hume*, 38, argues that "Mandeville and Bayle were important influences on Hume as he formulated this new philosophical project."

65. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 118–19; Harris, *Hume*, 116–17.

66. Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:780 (Remark H).

67. Ibid., 2:776 (Remark D).

68. See Norton, "Hume, Atheism, and the Autonomy of Morals," and Harris, "Answering Bayle's Question." Reviewing the *Political Discourses*, Matthew Maty (1718–76), secretary of the Royal Society, noted that Hume's writings not only matched the elegance of Bayle's but also reflected similar aims; see Popkin, "Bayle and Hume," 150.

69. Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 22, 58–91.

70. Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 123.

71. In a later essay, "Of the Origin of Government," written in 1774, Hume argued that this initial transition from a state of nature to a political society likely happened gradually, when a chieftain distinguished himself by his genius and valor and "could gradually, by a mixture of force and consent, establish his authority" (E-OG 39–40). Hume amended "Of the Original Contract" to reconcile his argument there with the more gradual narrative of society's beginnings in "Of the Origin of Government," which appeared in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1777). Hume emphasized that "this [initial] consent was long very imperfect, and could not be the basis of a regular administration." Still, the "sensible utility" resulting from the exercise of political leadership "gradually produced an habitual, and, if you please to call it so, a voluntary, and therefore precarious, acquiescence in the people" (E-OG 468–69).

72. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 15.

73. Ibid., 13. See also D'Agostino, *Free Public Reason*, 23.

74. Hampton's form of contractarianism, for example, does not rely on a "promissorial interpretation of consent" (*Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, 274).

75. Ibid., 231.

76. Ibid., 29.

77. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 28.

78. Merrill, "Rhetoric of Rebellion," 275.

79. In this essay, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic," Hume theorized that, because of "the progress of learning and of liberty," opinion in Great Britain had shifted away from monarchy and the "superstitious reverence to names and authority" toward republican self-government. Had opinion favored republican government during the Glorious Revolution, kingship might have been displaced in Great Britain.

80. Temple, "An Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government," 105. Harris, *Hume*, 178–79, has suggested that Hume's "understanding of the centrality of opinion to politics may have been taken from the writings of Sir William Temple." Hume rejected Harrington's thesis about power following property, in part because it could not explain the Restoration of 1660. Temple's thesis, on the other hand, that the opinion of the people was bent toward monarchy rather than republicanism, could effectively explain the return to kingship after more than a decade of republican experimentation.

81. Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 16.

82. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 414 (2.19.223).

83. Locke developed a corporealist metaphysics, an empirical epistemology, and a hedonistic ethics. As was the case in Gassendi's system, Locke's reliance on demonstration for theological investigation fits uncomfortably with the other elements of his philosophy. For more on the question of Gassendi's influence on

Locke and the Epicurean aspects of Locke's philosophy, see Driscoll, "Influence of Gassendi on Locke's Hedonism"; Kroll, "Question of Locke's Relation to Gassendi"; Lennon, "Epicurean New Way of Ideas"; Milton, "Locke and Gassendi."

84. Wilson, "Political Philosophy in a Lucretian Mode," 280.

85. One of Hume's aims in "Of the Original Contract" was to show that opinion of interest might not be the only consideration that grounds a people's acquiescence to political rule.

86. Hume defended the claim that in public emergencies, the laws of justice may properly be suspended, by arguing that "government binds us to obedience only on account of its tendency to public utility" (E-PO 489). In other words, opinion of interest takes precedence over opinion of right.

87. Hume described "the ancient barbarous and feudal constitution" as one characterized by "slavery" and "oppression" (E-CP 497). And he clearly thought such "unbounded dominion" as that which was evident in domestic slavery was unjust (E-PA 383–84).

88. Whelan, "Hume and Contractarianism," 214.

89. Only modern appropriations of Epicurean thought include a right of rebellion. Epicurus supposed that, for the good of one's country, one ought to defend the commonwealth when necessary and to comply with magistrates good or evil in order to uphold the constitution; see Bayle, "Epicurus," in *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, 2:785 (Remark O). Bayle agreed with Epicurus on this point.

90. Whelan, "Hume and Contractarianism," 201; Merrill, "Rhetoric of Rebellion," 263; Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 125.

91. See the discussion in Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 96–101.

92. Hume, in his later writings, was less willing to tolerate the ideas of "projectors" that would undermine the post–Glorious Revolution order and the Protestant Settlement. In "Of the Coalition of Parties," written in 1747 along with his essays criticizing Whig and Tory doctrines ("Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience"), Hume argued that the prerogative of the Tudors and Stuarts garnered "general consent" before the English civil wars. In the ensuing years, champions of Whig doctrine sought to "overthrow and subvert" the government to make the constitution align more with popular "consent," exercised through Parliament. Such innovations, though, are always dangerous. They can result in the replacement of "legal and mild monarchs" with tyrants. Nevertheless, the royalists before the Glorious Revolution could not have predicted the benefits of Whig revolutionary doctrine when cleansed of religious extremism, which was responsible for the peace and stability of the "present settlement of the constitution" that Hume supported (E-CP 498–501). By 1772, Hume worried that "excessive liberty" and democratic frenzy, of the kind exhibited in the Wilkes riots (1768) (see chapter 5 in this book), would destroy the proper balance between liberty and

authority. The "licentiousness of our odious patriots," which "so disgusted" Hume, led him to posit that "the English government is . . . probably not calculated for duration" (L 2:261).

93. Schabas and Wennerlind, *A Philosopher's Economist*, xiv, 7–8.

94. On the role of civil pluralism in Hume's thought, see Sabl, *Hume's Politics*, 53; Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 150–53; and Watkins, *Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*, 85–108.

95. Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1779), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:12–13.

96. Harris, *Hume*, 430–32, who has strongly denied that Hume belongs in the contractarian tradition, refers frequently to the idea of the "state of nature" when relaying Hume's argument in the essay "Of the Origin of Government." State of nature theorizing is one of the distinctives of the contractarian political vision.

97. Ibid., 13–14.

98. Ibid., 17.

99. Ibid., 19.

100. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 294.

101. Quoted in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 189.

102. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 294–95.

103. Ibid., 308.

104. Ibid., 308–11.

105. Ibid., 314.

106. Ibid., 317.

107. Ibid., 318.

108. Ibid., 324.

109. Ibid., 333.

110. Ibid., 334.

111. For a portrayal of Hume's theory as "social convention theory," see Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, 279; Sugden, "Contractarianism as a Broad Church."

## FOUR. Philosophic Foundations for a Liberal Way of Life

1. Though Baier used this phrase in reference to Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, she places Hume in the tradition of Mandeville, Rousseau, and Smith, all of whom employ mythical history to explain the origin of society, justice, and sociability; see Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 226–27.

2. Ibid., 227.

3. Philo, in the *Dialogues*, describes the primitive condition of man, before the institution of law and justice, in a Hobbesian manner as "a perpetual war . . . amongst all living creatures" (DNR 10.8, 96). In this condition, "Man is the greatest enemy of man. Oppression, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud; by these they mutually torment each other" (DNR 10.12, 97).

4. It was well known, however, that the Epicureans had argued that justice, as a virtue, is nothing in itself; see Gassendi, *Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma*, 235; for the English translation, see Charleton, *Epicurus's Morals*, 153. For Hobbes's statement that good and evil are not objects in themselves, see *Leviathan*, 35 (6.7). Hume, too, claimed that moral distinctions were like secondary qualities, such as color or taste, that, according to the Lockean theory of double existence, existed not in the objects themselves, but in the observer. Although Hutcheson, too, did not locate good and evil in objects themselves but in the moral sense, he thought the communicable divine virtue of benevolence directed the calm passions to prefer the universal good over the private good.

5. McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:373.

6. Merrill, "Investigating Morality with David Hume," 89.

7. Krause, *Civil Passions*, 12.

8. Cohon, *Hume's Morality*.

9. The rest of this passage reads as follows: "We shall easily satisfy ourselves on this head, when we consider, that every particular person's pleasure and interest being different, it is impossible men could ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them. Now in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examined; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him. And though such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own, yet being more constant and universal, they counter-ballance the latter even in practice, and are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend" (T 3.3.1.30). The argument of this chapter is that one cannot reach the common point of view without the artifice of justice.

10. See, for example, Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*.

11. See also Hanley, "David Hume and the 'Politics of Humanity.'"

12. Taylor is certainly correct that Hume, in his moral and political writings, defends "the kind of modern society of which he was a member" (Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 100–101).

13. I treat Hume's philosophy as presented in the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* as a unified whole. There has been a surge in scholarship over the last two

decades regarding the coherence of Hume's moral philosophy as it appears, on one hand, in the *Treatise* and, on the other, in the second *Enquiry*, but I take him at his word that the same "philosophical principles" and "doctrines" appear in each; see Hume, L 1:4, 158, 187. For the most recent contribution to this long-running debate, see Pitson, "Hume and Humanity as 'the Foundation of Morals.'"

14. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 120–30.

15. For a standard treatment of Hume as theorist of commercial sociability, see Hont, "Commercial Society and Political Theory in the Eighteenth Century."

16. Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 18. Cf. Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 57.

17. Harris, *Hume*, 265, 254–55.

18. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 303.

19. Ibid., 301.

20. Ibid., 339.

21. Ibid., 322.

22. For portrayals of Hume's philosophy as a vindication—though not entirely unqualified—of commercial modernity, see Berry, "Hume and the Customary Causes"; Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*; and Schabas and Wennerlind, *Philosopher's Economist*. Baier argues that whereas in the *Treatise* the general rules of justice pertain strictly to commercial justice, Hume expands his conception of justice in the second *Enquiry*; see Baier, *Cautious Jealous Virtue*.

23. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 176.

24. Ibid., 181.

25. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 125.

26. This position corresponds to previous assertions made by Cohon and Taylor that justice results in "profound psychological changes" and even a "cultural transformation of instinct"; see Cohon, "Hume's Artificial and Natural Virtues," 261, and Taylor, "Justice and the Foundations of Social Morality," 5–7.

27. Hanley, "David Hume and the 'Politics of Humanity,'" 215.

28. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 117.

29. Hanley, "David Hume and the 'Politics of Humanity,'" 219, 223.

30. Love, according to Hume, is necessarily followed by benevolence, the desire for the happiness of those we love; see Hume, T 2.2.6.3; T 3.3.1.30.

31. See, for example, Hume, T 3.3.2.10, and Hume, E-RP 132.

32. Whereas Taylor contends that Hume placed greater emphasis on the role of conversation in the creation of moral standards in the second *Enquiry*, Cohon offers the reminder that the import of conversation is also evident in the *Treatise*; see Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 122–23; Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 151.

33. See, for example, T 3.3.1.21, T 3.3.3.2, and Hume, E-ST 227, 229.

34. Hume's account of the rise of moral discourse in the second *Enquiry* mirrors Hume's account of the rise of aesthetic discourse in E-ST 239.

35. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 161.

36. Ibid., 173.

37. Ibid., 178.

38. Ibid., 173.

39. Ibid., 188–89.

40. Ibid., 165.

41. Ibid., 160.

42. Hume defended the superiority of modern philosophy and political forms in the essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences."

43. Hume, EPM, "A Dialogue," para. 27. Henceforward D, followed by paragraph.

44. Quoted in Harris, *Hume*, 250.

45. For evidence of this in Montesquieu's writings, see Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England*.

46. Hume, E-CL 90–93; E-RP 122–25.

47. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 338.

48. Ibid., 338–39.

49. Ibid., 23.

50. For more on this perspective, see Vassiliou, "Le Système de John Law," 161–78.

51. Taylor, too, recognizes Hume's point that "in societies that prize and privilege martial bravery, we find humanity and general compassion for others extinguished"; see Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 162; Hume, EPM 7.13–14.

52. On piety, see Heydt, "Practical Ethics," 369.

53. Voltaire, too, had declared that "of all religions, the Christian should of course inspire the most toleration, but till now the Christians have been *the most intolerant* of all men"; quoted in Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines*, 144–45. Rousseau agreed with Voltaire that Christian monotheism was much less tolerant than pagan polytheism. Hume developed this argument in his "Natural History of Religion": "The intolerance of almost all religions, which have maintained the unity of God, is as remarkable as the contrary principle of polytheists" (NHR 9.3, 161–64). In his essays, Hume cites Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and elevates pagan virtues over Christian virtues, regarding the former as active and the latter as passive; see Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, 11–14.

54. In "Of the Standard of Taste," Hume acknowledged that speculative errors, derived from religion, could corrupt a work of art and aesthetic appreciation, just as they could corrupt moral sentiments.

55. Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 33–34, 45, uses this term to describe the respective aims of both Hobbes's and Mandeville's political science.

56. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 129.

57. Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 179.

58. See also Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 123, 127.

59. Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 227.

60. Sagar writes that Hume's political theory focuses on "the institutional redirection of knavish behavior to the good of all" (Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 212). Harris, *Hume*, 173, too, writes that, for Hume, the "function of a constitution was to turn universal pursuit of self-interest to the good of society as a whole."

61. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 2.

62. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 6.

63. See Hume, T 1.3.10.2; 2.1.1.4; 2.3.1.1; 2.3.9.8.

64. Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 157–58.

65. Quoted in Harris, *Hume*, 366. Moderate ministers in Scotland attended and lauded the play, but members of the Popular Party, including George Anderson, rebuked ministers—and, in at least one case, suspended a minister—for supporting the stage, allegedly a site of diversion and immorality. The Moderates eventually won the argument concerning the merits of stage performances.

66. Bentham, *Fragment on Government*, 51. Bentham totally discarded the idea of the contract from his writings on political theory, following what he wrongly believed to be Hume's wholesale disavowal of the social contract tradition.

67. Bentham, *Deontology*, 188.

68. All catalogues of virtue and vice possess some overlap, of course. But Hume's catalogue in the second *Enquiry*, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, is similar to Benjamin Franklin's insofar as it is determined by utility. Hume, for example, does not derive his catalogue from the fitness of things based on an understanding of the human person's natural capacities; see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

69. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 18–19.

70. Bentham, *Deontology,* 135.

71. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 8.

72. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 83n.

73. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 159.

74. Nineteenth-century British idealists tried to articulate a more perfectionist form of liberalism. But perfectionist liberalism remains a minority viewpoint, overshadowed by the more secular and permissive forms of liberalism articulated by Hobbes, Hume, and Bentham. For a helpful overview situating the British idealists within the liberal tradition, see Jennings, "Liberalism and the Morality of Commercial Society." For an exemplary attempt to construct a more perfectionist liberalism, see George, *Making Men Moral*.

75. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature*, 119, suggested that the "Sceptic" represented Hume. Watkins, though, argues that though Hume clearly has the most sympathy for the "Sceptic," he questions some of the

"Sceptic's" views and accepts some of the arguments of the other characters; see Watkins, *Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*, 102, and Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers," 18. Other interpreters think Hume has more affinity with the "Stoic"; see Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 138–42; Potkay, *Passion for Happiness*, 77–79; Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic," 892.

76. Hume would later affirm this perspective in "Of Refinement in the Arts," writing that "human happiness, according to the most received notions, seems to consist in three ingredients; action, pleasure, and indolence: And though these ingredients ought to be mixed in different proportions, according to the particular disposition of the person; yet no one ingredient can be entirely wanting, without destroying, in some measure, the relish of the whole composition" (E-RA 269–70).

77. Balfour, *Delineation of the Nature and Obligation of Morality*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:94.

78. Ibid., 1:93.

79. Ibid., 1:94.

80. Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:18.

81. Clayton, *Some Thoughts on Self-love* (1763), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:106.

82. Harris speculates that Hume learned this fundamental maxim of politics from his reading of Mandeville, whose writing Hume "had immersed himself in ten years earlier." Harris describes Mandeville's political analysis in *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* as "strikingly similar to the one presented in *Essays, Moral and Political* "; see Harris, *Hume*, 173.

83. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 313.

84. Schabas and Wennerlind, *Philosopher's Economist*, 10.

85. Ibid., 109.

86. See ibid., 116–17.

87. Charles Mitchell (1756–1841), in his one work, *Principles of Legislation*, challenged Hume's view by arguing that it would be far preferable to recruit soldiers from surplus agricultural workers than industrial workers; see Mitchell, *Principles of Legislation*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 2:397.

88. See, for example, Mokyr, *Enlightened Economy*, and Goldberg, *Suicide of the West*.

89. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality*.

90. Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 161.

91. For the reception of the *Political Discourses* and Hume's reputation as an economist, see Schabas and Wennerlind, *Philosopher's Economist*.

92. See Watkins, *Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*, 4, 7.

93. Spencer writes that Hume "aimed to reach elite and eminent scholars who often in their works wrote for one another, but he also strove to make a living

by writing for an expanded audience of general readers (including women) to whose diverse interests he catered. Hume's writing life was very much linked to the growing world of print that was a central pillar of the Age of Enlightenment"; see Spencer, "Composition, Reception, and Early Influence," 241.

94. Hanvelt, *Politics of Eloquence*, 6–7, 30.

95. Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 146. Merrill, like Hanvelt, notes that political science is the guiding theme of Hume's *Essays*.

96. Ibid., 140.

97. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 191–92.

98. Russell, *Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 296.

99. This essay appeared only in volume 2 of *Essays, Moral and Political* (1742).

100. Hardin, *David Hume*, 25. Hardin claimed that Hume's theory was not normative, but strictly descriptive.

101. These ways of life might be denominated dangerous because they promote the spirit of persecution as well as the spirit of self-restraint, each of which dampens the spirit of industry, on which civilizational progress depends.

102. McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory*, 7, 58–81.

103. In "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," in which Hume defended the merits of a mixed constitution, he asserted that the modern systematic study of institutions, unlike the ancient politics of virtue, can produce principles of politics as "general and certain . . . as any which the mathematical sciences afford us" (E-PR 16). Hume said that this general maxim that everyone is a knave applies to the political arena, but he used it as a central maxim in the economic and religious arenas, too, as is evident when Hume assumed that individuals invented the laws of justice for the sake of self-interest and that religious individuals—clerics, especially—act most commonly for the sake of self-interest.

104. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 2:471–72.

105. Sagar, an advocate of the "realist" interpretation of Hume, posits that Hume's approach to politics elevates practice over theory; see Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 211.

## FIVE. Conservatizing Liberalism

1. Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism," 999.

2. This claim can be found in Livingston, "On Hume's Conservatism," 157.

3. At the opening of the essay, Hume described superstition and enthusiasm as "the corruptions of true religion" (E-SE 73). And in "Of the Parties of Great Britain," he argued that the monarchical part of the constitution would attract "those of mild tempers, who love peace and order, and detest sedition and

civil wars," while the republican part would attract "passionate lovers of liberty, who think no evil comparable to subjection and slavery" (E-PGB 64–65).

4. The Long Parliament (1640–60), which demanded that it consent to new taxation, passed the Triennial Act (1641), according to which Parliament had to be called to meet every three years for at least fifty days. The Long Parliament tried royal figures for treason for their support of "arbitrary" monarchy and abolished the Star Chamber.

5. For more on the differences between the parties, see Skjönsberg, *Persistence of Party*, 91–92.

6. Hume had also theorized in his *Essays* that the balance of the constitution eventually might tip in favor of the Crown.

7. This is why Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, referred to Hume's political doctrine as a "scientific," rather than "vulgar," Whiggism.

8. Since authority is a necessary condition for the enjoyment of liberty, Hume suggested that it is "much better for human society to be deprived of liberty than to be destitute of government" (HIST 5:194).

9. Hume, in arguing against the proponents of ancient constitutionalism, supposed that medieval society was totally feudal and totally servile, without sufficient institutional representation for the Commons between the time of William I, who introduced feudal tenures, and Henry III. Here, Hume seems to have been leaning on the Tory historical narrative produced by Dr. Robert Brady. The Court Whigs also described feudalism in this manner in an attempt to present English liberty as something entirely modern. For a discussion of this point, see Harris, *Hume*, 315–21.

10. See Spencer, "Hume the Historian," 288.

11. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 302.

12. On political nostalgia during this period, see Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 1–7.

13. Bolingbroke, *Political Writings*, 252.

14. See ibid., 81–82, 114–15.

15. Two prior histories contained this interpretation: James Tyrrell, *The General History of England* (1704), and M. Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England* (1725). Lord Bolingbroke cited Rapin's history repeatedly in *Remarks on the History of England* (1743) and *A Dissertation upon Parties* (1754), making it, in effect, the authoritative Whig history.

16. See Hume, HIST 2:525, 5:94–95. In an abstract of Hume's *History*, David Boyle wrote that Hume exposed the "pretended sanctity under the veil of the deepest hypocricy" displayed by politicians on both sides of the party divide; see Towsey, "The Book Seemed to Sink into Oblivion," 92.

17. This interpretation can be found in Carte, *A General History of England* (1747).

18. See, for example, HIST 3:264, 323; 4:144–45.

19. See HIST 4:403; L 1:264.

20. Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, 2:147; 1:121.

21. Ibid., 2:21, 86, 88.

22. Ibid., 1:121.

23. Earlier in the letter, Hume had boasted of his "great talent for cookery, the science to which I intend to addict the remaining years of my life." He then concluded his letter with a reference to cooking up a historical narrative, before commenting, "You see in my reflexions and allusions I still mix my old and new profession together."

24. Quoted in Bongie, *David Hume,* 74.

25. Hume admitted that he failed in his early attempts at impartiality because of his Whiggism. See NL 69–70.

26. See also Hume's remarks in L 1:171, 185, 193, 210, 226, 235, 242, 244, 261.

27. Spencer, "Hume the Historian," 292. On Hume as a Tory historian, see Mossner, "Was Hume a Tory Historian?"; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*; and Skjönsberg, *Persistence of Party*, 176–77.

28. Bongie, *David Hume*, 90–91. The following account of Hume's reception in France leans heavily on Bongie's scholarship.

29. See ibid., 18, 26–27.

30. Ibid., 86.

31. Quoted in ibid., 89n16.

32. Quoted in ibid., 143.

33. Ibid., 116.

34. For an instructive account of the birth of the Left and Right after the French Revolution, the former characterized by reason, republicanism, and revolution, and the latter by history, tradition, and monarchy, see Levin, *The Great Debate*.

35. Scholars who emphasize this feature in Hume's own writing include Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, and Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*. For a presentation of conservatism as a critique of ideology in politics, see Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*.

36. Bongie, *David Hume*, viii. Livingston describes Hume's *History* as "a force in the creation of modern political life" (ibid., ix).

37. Livingston, "On Hume's Conservatism," 156. Wolin argued that Hume, by favoring an empirical approach to political life, proved that "new premises could be fashioned from custom and sentiment" (Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism," 1004).

38. Quoted in Malherbe, "Hume's Reception in France," 54. Reviewers regularly referenced Hume's emulation of Bayle; see ibid., 74–75.

39. Wennerlind, "Hume's Political Economy," 336. Wennerlind mentions, "While this idealized historical vision has yet to materialize, Hume's analytical framework provides posterity with a taxonomy of necessary conditions for commercial prosperity to translate into material and moral refinement."

40. Zanardi, "Italian Responses to David Hume," 164, 171. The Catholic Church placed Hume's writings on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1761. By 1827, even Hume's essays and historical writings were placed on the Index. As a result, Hume's philosophical writings were difficult to obtain in Italy and other Catholic countries, including Poland. Robert Adam, though, writing from Rome in 1755, observed that "David Hume's Essays & his History are in great repute." He was surprised by the success of the former until he found out how many "misbelievers" were in Rome. At this time, the second edition of the French version of Hume's *Political Discourses* (1755), translated by Abbé Le Blanc (1707–81), likely circulated in Italy; see Zanardi, "Italian Responses to David Hume," 165, 168, 177. See also Kuśnierz, "David Hume and Polish Philosophical and Social Thought."

41. Wennerlind, "Hume's Political Economy," 326.

42. Berry, "Science and Superstition," 142.

43. The most persuasive cases for this interpretation of Hume as a liberal reformer can be found in Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, and McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory*. Hume, the reformer, wanted "to promote certain kinds of institutions—specifically those that foster individual freedom and commercial development" (see McArthur, "Hume and the Philosophy of Law," 356).

44. Whatley, "Economic Causes and Consequences of the Union of 1707," offers useful background for the Union of 1707.

45. For more on the effect of the Union Treaty on Scotland, see Berry, *Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment*.

46. Adam Ferguson, a member of what Richard Sher has termed the "moderate literati" of the Scottish Enlightenment, recommended a citizen militia as an institution that might offset the deleterious effects of commercial modernity, providing an outlet for sacrifice for the common good. See Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 203.

47. Harris writes, "The strategy [of transforming the Highlands] was one of internal colonization or, as the colonizers happily saw it, liberation, through capitalism" (Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, 149).

48. Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, 1:13–14.

49. Ibid., 296. Gibbon, in one instance, referred to Hume glowingly: "A [complimentary] letter from Mr. Hume overpaid the labour of ten years." In a journal entry from 1761, however, Gibbon seemed less impressed with Hume's abilities as a historian: "I read Hume's History of England to the reign of Henry

VII, just published, ingenious but superficial" (ibid., 195). Hume clearly thought highly of Gibbon, though, writing to Gibbon that he had succeeded at the task of writing an impartial history, a task that Hume had thought the English were too factious to accomplish; see Hume, L 2:309–11.

50. Whereas Pocock claims that Gibbon was influenced by the four-stages theory, Woudhuysen denies such an influence; see Pocock, "Gibbon and the Shepherds," and Woudhuysen, "Gibbon among the Barbarians," 95.

51. Millar, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, 4.

52. For more on the four-stages theory of history, which was also utilized by Ferguson and Lord Kames, see Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 14 (i.27); Meek, "Smith, Turgot, and the 'Four Stages' Theory"; and Skinner, "Hume's Principles of Political Economy."

53. The four stages of human history, though evident in Hume's *Essays*, do not appear as explicitly as they appear in the writings of Smith and Millar. See Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History," 154.

54. Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 162.

55. Ibid., 164; Emerson, *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 145–46.

56. Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 299.

57. Hume rejected this proposal in "Of Refinement in the Arts," E-RA 275–76.

58. Ferguson, *History of the Progress & Termination of the Roman Republic*, 179. Hugh Blair, who asserted that Ferguson's history of the fall of the Roman Empire was superior to Gibbon's, also associated the "loose epicurean system" with the decline of Rome (see Blair, *Sermons*, 5:134). For a similar narrative of Rome's fall, see Livy, *History of Rome*, 1:7. Berry, *Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 16, links this perspective with Stoic philosophy. John Brown, like Montesquieu and Ferguson, argued that "when the irreligious system of Epicurus prevailed in Greece and Rome, these unprincipled and profligate states were on the eve of their destruction" (Brown, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty*, 100). When Epicureanism prevailed, Brown argued, no one could be trusted to take an oath. Moral laxity and loss of social trust corrupted the populace.

59. Sumptuary laws in England, for example, were often somewhat protectionist in nature and seemed to have the intended effect of limiting conspicuous consumption and preserving class distinctions; see Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 78–84. See this instructive passage from Hume's *History*: "Luxury was complained of in that age, as well as in others of more refinement; and attempts were made by parliament to restrain it, particularly on the head of apparel, where surely it is the most obviously innocent and inoffensive. No man under a hundred a year was allowed to wear gold, silver, or silk in his clothes: Servants also were prohibited from eating flesh meat, or fish, above once a day. By another law it was ordained, that no

one should be allowed, either for dinner or supper, above three dishes in each course, and not above two courses: And it is likewise expressly declared, that *soused* meat is to count as one of these dishes. It was easy to foresee that such ridiculous laws must prove ineffectual, and could never be executed" (HIST 2:282).

60. Lord Kames also adopted this perspective when he argued that opulence and luxury would, by invigorating the senses, produce selfishness. See Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 1:230–31.

61. It is helpful to think of Hume's writings on improvement in the following manner: Hume's *Treatise* is a theoretical narrative of the origins of justice and society; "Natural History of Religion" is a conjectural narrative of the origin of religious belief; *History of England* is a historical narrative of civilization, of social and economic progress. On this last point, see Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 298. Holthoon argues that, since Hume portrayed social progress as a result of trial and error and of unintended consequences, Hume "had an idea but not a theory of progress" (Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History," 146). The argument of this chapter is that Hume did possess a rather robust theory of continual civilizational advancement.

62. Phillipson argues that the *History* is Hume's attempt "to apply philosophy to public life" and to "reform the political culture of modern Britain" (Phillipson, *David Hume*, 50, 134). Whelan and Sabl, on the other hand, emphasize Hume's empiricism and realism, treating Hume's *History* as an impartial scientific endeavor that is designed to produce a nonideal theory of politics (see Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, and Sabl, *Hume's Politics*). Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, regarded Hume's *History* as an impartial presentation of the different party positions in Great Britain. Wootton, "David Hume," suggests that Hume wrote the *History* not so much to produce a nonideal and experimental political science, but to touch the passions of middle-class readers, in order that their sentiments might be properly trained and that they might learn enough about human affairs to be conversant in polite society. Wootton claims, however, that Hume was not entirely impartial. Instead, Hume effectively endorsed the position of the Court Whigs. On Hume's efforts to shape the moral sentiments by means of his *History*, see Hilson, "Hume," 93.

63. Emerson, *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 130.

64. For the *History* as a narrative of progress, see Forbes, "The European, or Cosmopolitan, Dimension in Hume's Science of Politics." Danford, "Hume's History and the Parameters of Economic Development," 159, acknowledges that Hume's "politics of progress" coexists with the "politics of imperfection," since there is never a civilized society completely freed from barbarous elements.

65. Ruffhead, "Review of *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar*, in *The Monthly Review*" (1761–62), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 7:278. Ruffhead explained that he referenced "hospitable barbarism" because the

nobles always had their doors open to "all comers," including their retainers, even though their retainers remained "in the most abject subjection to their lords" (ibid., 7:278n10). Ruffhead was a perceptive reviewer whose specific criticisms of the *History* were read by Hume. Hume responded to Ruffhead's criticisms by making amendments to the specific passages of the *History* that Ruffhead cited.

66. Sabl, "Hume's History and Politics," 310.

67. This is the subject matter of the excellent essay by Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History."

68. Lord Bolingbroke, on the other hand, in an attempt to refute Dr. Robert Brady's criticisms of feudalism, supposed that it is better to be subject to powerful landlords than moneyed men with no ties to the land and no natural gifts, who were elevated to rule not by birth or merit but by fraud and corruption.

69. For an alternative history in defense of legal pluralism, which argues that the existence of separate jurisdictions served to protect individuals from abuses of power, see Berman, *Law and Revolution*.

70. Ruffhead, "Review of *The History of England, under the House of Tudor*, in *The Monthly Review*" (1759), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 7:198–99.

71. Ibid., 7:200.

72. This aligns with Karl Polanyi's argument that free market capitalism is a creation of the state. See Polanyi, *Great Transformation*.

73. Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, 1:57–58nn86–87.

74. See Berry, "Science and Superstition," 150.

75. There are, of course, exceptions to Hume's negative portrayal of Christianity. The clergy of the Roman Church preserved ancient literature from extinction and contributed to the science of jurisprudence after finding a copy of Justinian's Pandects. The Renaissance papacy, moreover, supported the fine arts and "facilitated the intercourse of nations." See Hume, HIST 2:519–20, 3:137.

76. Hume did not defend a policy of religious liberty, as Smith did in the *Wealth of Nations*; see Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 792–93. Hume thought religious freedom, which allows sects to operate on voluntary contributions and to compete with each other for members, was a recipe for sectarianism and discord. Though Hume did seem to advocate the free competition between sects in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (DNR 12.21, 125), he revised his position in the *History of England* and favored establishment.

77. See Hume, HIST 3:386–87.

78. Hume's treatment of the Tudors is indicative of his preference for absolute monarchy, according to Yenor, *David Hume's Humanity*, 141. Wootton, "David Hume," 474–77, however, argues that Hume most often writes in defense of mixed government. Wootton points to a letter, written in 1773, in which Hume

places the government of "good Queen Elizabeth" among the more uncultivated ages, contrary to what appears to be the case in the *History*.

79. In Stewart's words, "[Hume does not] display the true historian's love for the past" (Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 298).

80. Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History," 148.

81. Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*, 18, 136.

82. Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History," 154, emphasizes that Hume did not advocate the nineteenth-century view that humankind "had" to progress.

83. Emerson, *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 131.

84. Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 298.

85. Livingston, "On Hume's Conservatism," 156.

86. Sagar's interpretation, which in many ways follows Livingston's, is presented as "realism," rather than "conservatism" (Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*).

87. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 85.

88. Bongie, *David Hume*, xi, called Hume a "sceptical exploder of myths, and lucid revisionist in history as he was in philosophy."

89. Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 298–300.

90. Towsey, "The Book Seemed to Sink into Oblivion," 88–89.

91. Flexman, "Review of *The History of Great Britain. Vol. 1.*, in *The Monthly Review*" (1754), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 7:21.

92. Quoted in Towsey, "The Book Seemed to Sink into Oblivion," 85.

93. Towsey, "Patron of Infidelity," 95.

94. Ibid., 97.

95. Ibid., 111.

96. Ibid., 121n68.

97. Ibid., 106.

98. Garden, Lord Gardenstone, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1791), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 8:191.

99. More, *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 8:369.

100. Palgrave, "Hume and His Influence upon History" (1844), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 8:369.

101. Ibid., 8:368.

102. Ibid., 8:375–76.

103. Ibid., 8:377.

104. Ibid., 8:379–80.

105. Ibid., 8:380–81.

106. Ibid., 8:383.

107. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, 1:17, quoted in Laursen, "Custom in Hume's Politics and Economics," 347.

108. For this interpretation, see Fosl, *Hume's Scepticism*.

109. Laursen, "Custom in Hume's Politics and Economics," 346.

110. Livingston, "On Hume's Conservatism," 158.

111. Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism," 1015–16.

112. MacQueen, *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain* (1756), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 7:133.

## SIX. Hume, Political Liberalism, and the Reign of "Public Reason"

1. Quoted in Spencer, *Hume's Reception in Early America*, 86.

2. Ibid., 86. Spencer describes Hume's *Enquiries* as "standard reading in America."

3. Quoted in ibid., 87.

4. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 3–5.

5. Rawls regarded the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Locke's *Second Treatise*, and Mill's *On Liberty* as texts that formed part of the public political culture of the United States (ibid., 6).

6. Ibid., 23.

7. Ibid., 4.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. I have not depended on Charles Taylor's writings in developing my argument, but his description of the "social imaginary" is helpful. Our shared myths and narratives inform "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations . . . shared by large groups of people . . . that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (see Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23).

10. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 13.

11. Ibid., 161.

12. Rawls questioned the degree to which libertarians, who continued to defend limited government and economic freedom against the intrusions of the welfare state, qualified as "liberals," since they "don't exemplify [liberalism's] third element of assuring to citizens adequate all-purpose means to make use of their freedoms" (ibid., 13).

13. It is essential to note that Rawls was a staunch critic of utilitarianism, insofar as it did not give priority to liberty.

14. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, xvii.

15. Ibid., 172.

16. Ibid., 170.

17. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 60–61.

18. Ibid., 58.

19. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 107.

20. Ibid., 14.

21. Ibid., 20.

22. For an alternative understanding, see Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 109–13.

23. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 36.

24. Ibid., 30.

25. Ibid., 24–25.

26. Ibid., 35.

27. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 323.

28. Ibid., 236–37.

29. Ibid., 244.

30. Ibid., 228–29.

31. Ibid., 221.

32. Rawls commented that "reasoning and thought of all kinds, is moved by some interest. This is as true in Kant as it is in Hume" (ibid., 178).

33. Ibid., 218.

34. Ibid., 207.

35. McArthur, "Hume and the Philosophy of Law," 354. McArthur specifies that Hume should not be categorized as a legal positivist himself, because, unlike Hobbes and Bentham, he did not define law as a command expressing the wish of a sovereign.

36. Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 11–15.

37. Hont equates Kant's theory of unsocial sociability with Smith's conception of commercial society.

38. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 320.

39. Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," 200.

40. There is tremendous discord between Kant's account of practical reasoning and Hume's. It is debatable whether Hume articulated an account of practical reasoning, but Rawls argued in his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* that he did. Kant posited that faith is rational, whereas Hume argued that faith is irrational. Kant supposed that belief in God and immortality serve as postulates that make practical reasoning possible. Nevertheless, Kant, following Hume's critiques of natural theology, particularly the teleological and ontological proofs for God's existence, effectively put an end to natural theology for those who accepted his arguments.

41. Kuehn, "The Reception of Hume in Germany," 117. Kuehn writes that Kant lectured on Hume in the mid-1750s and encouraged his students to read

Hume. Kant suggested, moreover, that Hume's books, along with Rousseau's, Locke's, and Montesquieu's, are "of such great importance and require so much investigation" that "they must be read often."

42. Quoted in Alexander Hill Everett, "ART. II.—*Critick of Pure Reason; translated from the Original of* IMMANUEL KANT" (1839), in Spencer, *Hume's Reception in Early America*, 262.

43. Everett, a graduate of Harvard College, served as private secretary to Adams in Russia in 1809.

44. Ibid., 262. Everett was not alone in thinking this. In Russia, D. I. Pisarev (1840–68), a radical publicist, declared, "Hume's scepticism, Berkeley's idealism, and Kant's transcendental idealism were inevitable logical consequences of that general movement of thought which destroyed and ground into dust the whole colossal edifice of the Middle Ages"; quoted in Artemieva and Mikeshin, "Hume in Russia," 211.

45. A professor at Moscow University, P. D. Yurkevich (1827–74), pointed out that Hume's ideas were incorporated into Kant's doctrine, which "corresponds to the social theory that hopes to establish everyday social life and the peoples' good not on the eternal laws of justice, but on the general consent of individual citizens"; quoted in ibid., 211.

46. As Stewart argued, because society and the state are artificial, the principles by which they operate constitute the "rules of the game" (Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, 312).

47. See Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"; Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, 280–81; Kelly, *Liberalism*, 114.

48. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 16.

49. Ibid., 103.

50. Ibid., 126.

51. Ibid., 76.

52. Ibid., 15.

53. Ibid., 441.

54. Larmore, *Morals of Modernity*, 146; Kelly, *Liberalism*, 11–12; Nussbaum, "Perfectionist Liberalism and Political Liberalism," 22.

55. Rawlsian public reason applies to judges, government officials, and candidates for office in the public political forum, but not to families, private associations, universities, and religious institutions in the background culture.

56. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 180.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 128.

59. Ibid., 94.

60. Ibid., 180.

61. Ibid, 190. Cohen disagrees with Rawls that political liberalism can do without truth and suggests a political conception of truth that would be appropriate for public political discourse; see Cohen, "Truth and Public Reason," 2–42.

62. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 190.

63. See Wilson, "Hume and Vital Materialism."

64. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 230–32 (10.9).

65. For the resemblance of this approach to Platonic dialectic, see Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 142; Stauffer, "Reopening the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns," 229.

66. Cicero, *On Invention*, 5–7 (1.2).

67. For the avoidance of moral authoritarianism as the aim of political liberalism, see Gaus, *Order of Public Reason*.

68. Enoch, "The Disorder of Public Reason"; Wall, "Public Reason and Moral Authoritarianism"; Mang, "Public Reason Can Be Reasonably Rejected."

69. Larmore, "Political Liberalism," 85, acknowledges this.

70. Bohman, "Deliberative Toleration"; Vallier, "Public Justification versus Public Deliberation."

71. Gray, *Liberalism*, 24.

72. Garsten's study focuses on Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, rather than Hume; see Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, 177.

73. Harris, *Hume*, 193.

74. Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 151.

75. Ibid., 152.

76. Cicero, *Academics*, 649 (2.46).

77. Ibid., 647–49 (2.45).

78. Anderson, *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion Personally and Publicly Stated*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:72.

79. Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:25.

80. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 312.

81. Ibid., 297.

82. Ibid., 301.

83. Reid, *On Practical Ethics*, 10–11.

84. Ibid., 10.

85. Ibid., 32.

86. Graham, "Review: Knud Haakonssen (ed.) Thomas Reid on Practical Ethics, Edinburgh." Harris, *Hume*, 135, emphasizes Hume's rejection of the *honestum*.

87. Aurelius, *Meditations*, 119 (12.26).

88. Cicero, *On Duties*, 42 (1.107).

89. Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, 41 (2.45).

90. Reid, *On Practical Ethics*, 7.
91. Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 217.
92. Reid, *On Practical Ethics*, 11.
93. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 305.
94. Ibid., 302.
95. Augustine, *Against the Academics*, 45 (1.9).
96. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 305.
97. Reid, *On Practical Ethics*, 5.
98. Ibid., 9.
99. Hume was the only Scottish Enlightenment philosopher to present duties in a twofold rather than threefold manner; see Heydt, "Practical Ethics." According to Reid, duties to God are "Love Esteem Veneration Gratitude Submission Obedience. External Religion" (Reid, *On Practical Ethics*, 17). Gordon Graham observes that, for Reid, duties to God were "the foundation of the other two," namely, duties to oneself and to others; see Graham, "Review: Knud Haakonssen (ed.) Thomas Reid on Practical Ethics, Edinburgh."
100. Reid, *On Practical Ethics*, 9, 155–57.
101. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 12–13.
102. Reno, "The End of Christendom?," 65.
103. Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*, 130.
104. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:387.
105. Balfour, *A Delineation of the Nature and Obligation of Morality*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:94.
106. Ibid., 1:95.
107. Ibid.
108. Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers* (1755–58), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:110.
109. Dwight, *Nature, and Danger, of Infidel Philosophy, exhibited in Two Discourses, addressed to the Candidates for the Baccalaureate, in Yale College* (1798), in Spencer, *Hume's Reception in Early America*, 107–10.
110. McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 1:374–75.
111. Smith claimed that "the very suspicion of a fatherless world, must be the most melancholy of all reflections"; Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 277 (6.2.3.1). Whereas Dunn thought Smith was commenting on the hopelessness of Hume's atheistic system, Sagar supposes that Smith's system, no less than Hume's, does without God. For this reason, Sagar argues that neither Hume nor Smith thought that anguish was the only response to the idea of a fatherless world. Sagar states, "If it is true that we no longer have good reason to believe in God and make His design central to our political practices and self-understandings, it is bizarre

to be troubled by the prospects for a world that does without God, one finding its sources of validation and vindication in less metaphysically discredited locations" (see Sagar, *Opinion of Mankind*, 237–38).

112. Haldane, *Memoirs of Robert Haldane* (1852), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:331. This account provides the source, and additional detail, to the account relayed by Robert Haldane (1764–1842), *Evidence and Authority of Divine Revelation* (1834), in ibid., 9:327–29.

113. "On the Death-Bed of Hume the Historian," in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:325–26.

114. Silliman, *Journal of Travels in England, Holland, and Scotland*, in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 9:320–21.

115. Horne, *Letters on Infidelity* (1784), in Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 10:52.

116. Smith, *Select Discourses*, 135–36.

117. Hume's more explicitly philosophical works were placed on the Index in 1761. By 1827, all of Hume's works were placed on the Index on account of his irreligion. Robert Adam, a painter and architect, wrote to Hume from Rome in 1755 that his *Essays* and *History* were "in great repute. The last I am not much surprizd at. . . . But the first I own I did not imagine till I found on inquiring, the Misbelievers about Rome are not few in number, which soon removed all my Doubts"; quoted in Zanardi, "Italian Responses to David Hume," 168, 177.

118. Quoted in ibid., 174.

## Conclusion

1. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 22.

2. For this interpretation of Hume's reputation in Germany, see Kuehn, "Reception of Hume in Germany," 110–12. Hamann discussed Hume in *Socratic Memorabilia* (1759).

3. In this way, Willis makes the case for the necessity of theistic belief, of a philosophic variety, in Hume's system; see Willis, *Toward a Humean True Religion*, 52–53, 55. Willis goes so far as to argue that "Hume's very approach to philosophy, his moderate skepticism, and his theory of mind do not deny—and stated more strongly, presuppose—belief in basic theism" (ibid., 67). Willis's argument that Hume's philosophy presupposes belief in basic theism does not depend on the interpretation of Hume as a skeptical realist, who thinks that causal power has real existence, even though it is epistemically inaccessible to us. This interpretation has sparked considerable debate among scholars over the last three decades. See, for example, the entries in Read and Richman, *New Hume Debate*.

4. Graham presents Reid's moral rationalism as an alternative to both Clarke's moral realism and Hume's moral subjectivism. See Graham, *Theories of Ethics*, 9–12.

5. On Hume's erasure of the division between humanity and animals, Baggini writes, "Whereas Christendom had historically asserted a clear divide between humanity and the animal kingdom, Hume argued that humans were in essence no different from animals. Pre-Darwin, this was quite extraordinary" (see Baggini, *Great Guide*, 236).

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